MINOR PHOTOGRAPHY

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The Lieven Gevaert Series is published by Leuven University Press, and distributed in North America by Cornell University Press.

MINOR PHOTOGRAPHY

CONNECTING DELEUZE AND GUATTARI TO PHOTOGRAPHY THEORY

Edited by

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LEUVEN UNIVERSITY PRESS

Contents

Acknowledgements

When in the Spring of 2010 we started organizing a conference on the topic of 'Minor Photography,' we had no idea of how the concept would be received. We were pleasantly surprised to see that our interest and enthusiasm was shared with many others. My first words of gratitude go to all authors present in this book and the generosity with which they engaged in this intellectual adventure. Not only have they greatly contributed to the debate, they also offered numerous new perspectives as to how the 'minor' in the field of photography could be elaborated. I would also like to thank all photographers/artists and other copyright holders for their permission to reproduce the selected works in this volume.

This book would not have been possible without the sustained support of Hilde Van Gelder and Alexander Streitberger, directors of the Lieven Gevaert Research Centre for Photography and inspiring editors of this series. My most whole-hearted thanks to Esther Rosser and Jeroen Verbeeck for carefully and critically reading and re-reading the manuscript. A special word of thank goes to Jan Baetens, who has been one of the driving forces behind the Minor Photography project from its very beginning. Finally, I would like to thank KULeuven for financially supporting this research project.

Introduction

Mieke Bleyen

How can we consider photography as variation and multiplicity? In recent years, the Lieven Gevaert Research Centre for Photography has been tackling this question in multiple ways. In line with contemporary developments in photographic research, the centre has questioned the dominant conceptions of the medium as a fixed slice of time and place and contributed to the opening of photography theory towards questions of duration, narration and movement. It has also reconsidered the 'place' of photography by addressing the relationship between the global and the local, with a special interest for national frameworks. *Collective Inventions,* for instance, addressed Surrealism in Belgium and problematized an all too easy hierarchized binary thinking in terms of center (Surrealism in Paris) and periphery (Allmer and Van Gelder, 2007).

It was in this context that the concept of 'minor photography' came into focus, understood less as a label than as a valuable tool to conceive photography in a more dynamic and relational way. The contributions in this book are the outcome of the conference 'Minor Photography: The Case of (Post)Surrealism' (Leuven, November 2009) and two fruitful days of exploring how this concept of the 'minor' could be useful for the photographic field. As the subtitle of this volume suggests, the notion of minor photography is borrowed from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari who first elaborated the concept of a minor literature in *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1986). Drawing on Franz Kafka's diary, Deleuze and Guattari defined minor literature in terms of its high coefficient of deterritorialization, its immediate political nature, and its collective enunciation. In other words, a minor literature deterritorializes the dominant use of a language, makes it stutter and stammer. It brings to the fore the intense and affective qualities of language by moving language to the borders of its representational level, towards music or silence. Further, a minor literature is always immediately connected to politics. In

such literature each individual intrigue is immediately related to the political as exemplified by Kafka's character 'K,' who lacks any clear biographical roots and continuously runs through all segments of society. Here politics is not understood as overt political critique, for that would be to remain within the same realm, or merely to find a new dominant voice to replace the existing standard. Rather the politics of the minor is connected to a becoming, a work of demolition which is continuously the building of a new assemblage. Finally, in a minor literature everything takes on a collective value. Basically this implies that within minor literatures writers try to efface themselves and articulate collective voices. But if the minor writer becomes a spokesperson for a collective, it is necessarily one that is still in the making—a people which are missing, a people yet to come.

Of course these three features of minor literature do not operate in isolation from each other, rather they are closely intertwined and together involve what Simon O'Sullivan in the first essay of this volume describes as 'the glitch.' The glitch plays a double role by providing 'a moment of critique, a moment of negation—but also a moment of creation and of affirmation.' It functions as a kind of circuit breaker, pointing to an outside (of knowledge, or making-sense), in other words to a '"sound" of something else, this something different attempting to get through.'

Importantly, in this Deleuzo-Guattarian context, the twin notions of minor/major are not to be regarded as simply another binary opposition but rather as concepts that should enable us to escape binary thinking. In short, they serve to think language, and with it literature, in terms of variation. Major or minor as such do not qualify two different languages (for instance official language versus dialects), but two different usages of the same language, two different treatments of the continuous variation that is virtual in every language. Accordingly the variables can be treated in such a way as to extract from them constants and constant relations (re/territorialization), in which case we could speak of a major use. Or they can be twisted and intensified (deterritorialization), which could then be defined as a minor use. This is also why Deleuze and Guattari write that a minor literature 'doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986a: 16-17).' Kafka, writing in the dried-out German of the Habsburg bureaucratic apparatus, or Afro-American literature are examples of such minor usages. This does not imply, however, that minor literature is the sole privilege of minorities such as immigrants forced to function in a language that is not their own. After all every

language is open for minor usage. For those writers who don't have access to this kind of deterritorialized language Deleuze and Guattari advise to 'make use of the polylingualism of one's own language, to make a minor or intensive use of it, to oppose the oppressed quality of this language to its oppressive quality, to find points of nonculture or underdevelopment, linguistic Third World zones by which a language can escape, an animal enters into things, an assemblage comes into play (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986a: 26-27).'

In analogy, minor photography could then be considered as photography that experiments with the medium, bringing it towards its borders, and along the way deterritorializing the dominant codes of representation by operating directly in society, instead of merely representing it. It does not as much seek to develop a unique voice or style than to both address and speak for a future community. It causes short circuits within the dominant codes of photographic representation and as such creates a 'glitch.' In short, it is a photography that shifts and mutates the standardized way of practicing photography.

Obviously, it would be naïve to apply the notion to photography without acknowledging that a shift from literature to photography means a change in medium. Any discussion of photography in terms of the minor must, therefore, necessarily take into account the binaries and the changing hierarchies that are operative within a strongly varied photographic field. In that sense, this collection of essays is less a translation of minor literature to photographic terms than a transfer, or to borrow a phrase from Mieke Bal—a 'making travel' of the concept (Bal, 2002). Applying the notion of the minor to the new milieu of photography might also challenge and transform our first understanding of the minor in its turn.

To start with, connecting the minor with photography necessarily implies reading Deleuze against the grain, and thus already entails the first 'making travel.' Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari seem not at all to have been attracted to photography, and this has everything to do with the way they equated the medium with the logic of the 'cliché'—photography's documentary and representational qualities—and with memory or narrative illustration (Deleuze, 2003). Photography here comes to stand for what Deleuze and Guattari have described in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988) as the reigning regime of faciality, which pins us on the white wall of signifiance and sucks us into the black holes of subjectivity—the example of Facebook here comes easily to mind. In an almost un-Deleuzian way then, photography in

this context appears as a metaphor for the 'cliché,' leaving no space left to think the medium as multiplicity or variation.

In a similar fashion, in his first volume on Cinema, Deleuze reduced photography to the snapshot—the immobile entity from which the moving image in cinema is constituted. Obviously, Deleuze was not the first to theorize photography in terms of stillness and immobility against the experience of duration in the moving image of cinema. In fact, by considering photography as a 'mould of time,' which immobilizes the instant, he inscribed himself in a tradition of writers discussing photography in relation to cinema, bringing to mind André Bazin's often quoted statement that photography 'embalms time (Bazin, 1960: 8; Deleuze, 1986b: 24).'

Today, the very idea that photography—encompassing techniques and practices as different as the nineteenth century daguerreotype and the digitally created and stored photography of our own era—can be captured in one essentializing definition seems no longer tenable. Indeed, since its invention photography has had very different incarnations and has been the object of many debates about what the medium could or should be. Recent theories of photography approach the medium as multiplicity and aim at better understanding its 'multifaceted and complex character (Kriebel, 2007; Van Gelder and Westgeest, 2011: 1).'

In recent years both Deleuze scholars and photography researchers have started reading Deleuze and Guattari's writings against the grain, adopting their concepts in order to think photography precisely in terms of duration, becoming and event (Wittmann, 2009; Sutton, 2009; Kramp, 2012). Their writings suggest that in order to think of photography in terms of the minor we will necessarily need to deterritorialize Deleuze and Guattari's own writings, confront them with their outside. This reciprocal relation is what this book is all about.

This does not mean that Deleuze and Guattari's observations on photography as 'cliché' are of no relevance at all but rather that what they describe as the 'cliché' should in itself already be considered as an example of photography's major, standardized usage. In many respects, Deleuze and Guattari's unfavorable attitude towards photography's role in the politics of representation, and its relation to the development of bourgeois subjectivity in an era of capitalism is shared by a large number of prominent theoreticians/practitioners of photography, such as Allan Sekula, Victor Burgin or Martha Rosler (to name but a few). Yet this did not prevent these same authors/artists to continue to assert the critical (political) potential

of that very same medium. In a similar way, the contributions in this volume all testify to a common belief that photography as a medium is open both to major and minor usages. Hence, it becomes all the more important to question how the notion of the photograph as a slice of time, as a transparent window on reality and as an objective representation acquired a dominant major position and thus became the photographic 'cliché.' Seen from this perspective, Deleuze and Guattari invite us to map the movements of de- and re-territorialization that are operative within the photographic field. Their concept of the minor makes us aware of the lines of flight that orient certain photographic practices away from the 'cliché' and yet equally of the reterritorializations that neutralize and tame them again, as for instance by the art institute or the mass media's apparatuses of capture.

One interesting way to think about the notion of the photographic cliché in a more dynamic way, and in photographic terms, can be found in Vilém Flusser's *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (2006). Flusser's writings demonstrate that it is perfectly possible to acknowledge the 'visual pollution' of photographic clichés while simultaneously leaving the door open for photographic practices that operate against those clichés, and make the dominant use of the medium stammer. Central in Flusser's theory of photography is that the camera is an apparatus, the interior of which is an impenetrable black box. As such it is programmed in a way that the camera's competences are always greater than that of its functionaries (the photographers). A photographer thus can only control the camera's exterior and has to obey the rules of the program hidden in the black box. Photography, then, has much in common with a game, but one in which the photographer does not play with but *against* his plaything (Flusser, 2006: 27). Aiming to produce better and ever more photographs, and continuously improving itself by the mechanism of social feedback, this program in its turn relies on other programs: the photographic industry, the socio-economic system, etc… It is precisely the role of the black box and the power of its program(mer), that is systematically being underestimated, making human beings the functions of the apparatus instead of the other way around. Flusser here points at the dark side of deskiling. By its mechanism of social feedback, the camera has become increasingly easy to manipulate, or at least, its outside. To quote Flusser: the camera has become a 'structurally complex, but functionally simple plaything,' as a result of which 'everyone can make a photograph,' but 'very few know how the apparatus actually functions (ibid.: 57).' Appearing to be screens or windows of reality, photographs thus hold society

under a magical spell, with a photomania as result. Throughout the world people are making ever more redundant images using the same categories or 'clichés,' as Deleuze and Guattari would call them.

It is in this context of 'visual pollution' that the experimental photographer comes in. Hunting for situations never seen before, he consciously uses his camera against itself, exhausts its program, which he pushes towards its limits (deterritorialization), realizing images which were not yet predicted within the program. In doing so, he smuggles in a space for human intention within the apparatus (politicization). Hence, for Flusser, experimental photographers are 'in miniature, people of the apparatus future' (collectivization) and 'give rise to a model of freedom in the post-industrial context in general (ibid.: 80-82).'

Seen from the Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective, Flusser then allows us to appreciate the mutual interaction between major photography (the highly programmed, dominant way of photographing, which Deleuze calls the photographic 'cliché') and a minor photography, which continuously pushes that program towards its own borders but which—by processes of feedback—also risks being captured again by that very program. If Flusser offers a first tool to think photography beyond or against the 'cliché,' the aim of the essays gathered in this book is then to give rise to many more productive encounters and to make the notion of minor literature/photography travel further.

The first section of this book, *Theorizing the Minor* however, still remains very close to the writings of Deleuze and Guattari and serves as the theoretical backbone to which the many references to minor literature in other essays can be related. One could say it maps the territory from where the concept of minor photography can begin to travel. In that sense Simon O'Sullivan's essay 'From Stuttering and Stammering to the Diagram: Towards a Minor Art Practice?' serves as the perfect entry. Although hardly mentioning photography, O'Sullivan sets the scene by opening the notion of minor literature towards other writings by Deleuze and Guattari on art and connecting them to contemporary art practices. O'Sullivan is especially interested in the way the minor helped Deleuze and Guattari to think literature beyond representation. It is precisely the stuttering and stammering quality of minor literature, this 'undoing of representation' related to 'the glitch,' that he finds in the concepts of the figural, probe-heads or the diagram introduced in Deleuze's book on Francis Bacon's painting. But how can this

thinking beyond representation be connected to photography what O'Sullivan refers to as 'the representational medium?' What is photography's glitch? A first possible answer comes from Gilles Rouffineau's essay 'Tichý as a Maverick: Singular Figure of a Minor Photography.' This essay further elaborates the definition of a minor literature by confronting Deleuze and Guattari's definition with its source material: the diary of Franz Kafka, where the notion was first mentioned to describe literature written in the language of a (political) minority (vehicular Czech or mythic Yiddish). Rouffineau argues that Deleuze and Guattari's appropriation of Kafka's concept involved a certain inversion, in order to enable them to discuss Kafka's writings (in German) in terms of a minor literature, now defined as 'that what a minority constructs within a major language (Deleuze and Guattari 1986a: 16).' This exploration of the minor takes place within a continuous dialogue on photography and the very specific, dynamic position it has been occupying with regard to the art world. Indeed, photography could for most part of its history be considered a minor practice in relation to the major art field. On the other hand, from its very beginnings the medium has had its proper regulations and hierarchical divisions, as for instance between professional and amateur practices. Within this context, Rouffineau introduces the peculiar case of 'outsider' photographer Miroslav Tichý as a possible example of minor photography and explores the tensions that arise when a minor practice is suddenly 'discovered,' and introduced within the art institute. My own contribution to this book, 'Always in the Middle: the Photographic Work of Marcel Mariën. A Minor Approach,' takes a more methodological turn. It explores the minor in connection to other concepts such as rhizome or becoming, which Deleuze and Guattari developed more elaborately in *A Thousand Plateaus (1988)*. These concepts allowed me to address the problem of the 'belated' in the work of Marcel Mariën, Surrealist of the second generation who worked until the early 1990s. To grasp his work, art history's classic recipes and terminology such as 'evolution/(neo)-avant-garde,' a thinking in genealogies (schools and generations) has little to offer. The concepts proposed by Deleuze and Guattari on the other hand, have many advantages and permit thought beyond family trees, by replacing them by a rhizomatic thinking of alliances. This kind of approach is less interested in questions of origin and destination than in what moves in the middle. I argue that it is in the middle that the work of Mariën should be located. This can also be connected to the very specific aesthetics developed by Mariën, a minor aesthetics which precisely moves

between high and low, public and private, art and porn, professional and amateur photographic practice and as such makes photography stammer.

The essays in the second part of the book, *Major Artists – Minor Practices,* demonstrate how minor photography is not the exclusive terrain of photographers or artists working in the margins, but how minor operations can be found within what could be considered major or canonical practices. The minor in this section often becomes as much a methodology as a definition, in that it asks for new approaches and strategies, demanding attention for certain aspects of works or practices that previously remained under the radar. As Deleuze and Guattari demonstrated in their Kafka-book, thinking in terms of the minor very likely brings with it a break with classic readings—psychoanalytical, in the case of Kafka—and demands instead a form of experimentation, a mapping of the lines of flight and movements of de-/re-territorialization. 'Fear of Reflection: The Photoworks of Paul McCarthy' by Neil Matheson brings such an experiment. Matheson produces an encounter between the early photoworks of Paul McCarthy and Deleuze and Guattari's book on Kafka. His interest lies not only in Deleuze and Guattari's definition of a minor literature but also in their conception of the 'law' as immanence, their criticism of Oedipal readings, and the notion of becoming-animal, all highly relevant for McCarthy's work. More in general, Matheson's essay points to the inherently subversive, political (minor) associations that photography still carried in the early 1970s, causing it to attract many performance artists and conceptual artists who wanted to deterritorialize the language of art. In 'Considering the Minor in the Literary and Photographic Works of Rodney Graham and Tacita Dean,' Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, on the other hand, deals with photographic practices that are today fully accepted within the contemporary art world but in which nevertheless, minor usages can be discerned. In the work of Tacita Dean or Rodney Graham for instance the minor seems not only active in the choice for an 'archaic' analogue technology but also in the lines of flight away from visual art towards literary writing. Lerm Hayes highlights the interaction between Dean and Graham's photographic and literary production, between image and word and indicates that it is precisely in the contact zones, in the confrontation with the outside that their practices tend to become minor. It is at this junction between both practices, that the book as object for 'bilingual' activity comes in and involves a becoming minor. In the last essay of this section, 'Entertaining Conceptual Art: Dan Graham on Dean Martin,' Eric de Bruyn argues that the

non-dialectical notions of minor and major can work as useful correctives to some of the blind spots and exclusions within major art history. Starting from an interview published in Artforum in which Dan Graham compared the conceptual artist with a stand-up comedian, de Bruyn shows that one such persistent blind spot has been conceptual art's more humorous, witty side, its affinity for entertainment and television. By redirecting the focus to the creative function of jokes and wit in conceptual art, de Bruyn (with Graham) pushes against and beyond the grid of seriousness and academic discourse within which major art history has locked up conceptual art. Drawing upon Paolo Virno's 2008 essay, 'Jokes and Innovative Action,' de Bruyn argues that jokes in art can become minor forces, creating lines of flight and addressing a people yet to come.

The third section, *Surrealism in Variation,* further challenges major art history and explores the minor as a useful tool to consider photography as multiplicity. It relates many of the above-mentioned questions to a very specific corpus of (post)Surrealist photography. The essays in this part seek to contribute to a remapping of the history of Surrealist photography. In line with recent developments in Surrealism scholarship, they question the idea of a universal Surrealist language of photography, which often comes down to a reduction to its Parisian forms. Instead, Surrealist photography is considered in its heterogeneity, with a special focus on the dynamics between the so-called 'center' or dominant position and 'periphery' or marginal position. One such variant of Surrealism can be found in the parasitic model of Belgian Surrealism, as discussed by Frédéric Thomas in 'Towards a Minor Surrealism: Paul Nougé and the Subversion of Images.' Thomas argues that the Subversion of Images series is exemplary for the way the Brussels' Surrealists parasitically appropriated dominant, habitual ways of seeing or dealing with the world and its objects in order to subvert these daily habits—Deleuze and Guattari's 'clichés'—from within. For that reason Nougé turned the documentary style as a tool to clinically and transparently trap the world against itself, subverting it by the unmistakable mediated qualities of montage and staging. With its witty commentary on the dogmatics of French Surrealism, like automatic writing practices this photographic series also sharply brings into view the often ambiguous relationship between a Surrealism on the margins (Brussels) that in many ways cherished its liberating distance from the Center (Paris). In 'Conceptual Art and Surrealism: an Exceptional, Belgian Liaison,' Liesbeth Decan deals with belated and variable forms of Surrealism, or rather, with the ways the photographic work of many now called 'conceptual artists' in Belgium in the 1960s and 1970s

formed a peculiar assemblage with Surrealism, and notably with the work of René Magritte. Decan argues that in Belgium the connection between both 'movements' went well beyond Surrealism's and Conceptual Art's generally acknowledged common interest in deskilled usage of the medium, photography's reproducibility, and its special ties to reality or explorations of text-image relationships. Rather, the essay demonstrates that conceptual artists in Belgium worked in continuation with the Surrealist legacy and took over many of the procedures that were typical of Brussels Surrealism, such as re-writing and staging practices, the creation of disturbing objects, and, of course, Magritte's word-image explorations. As such, these conceptual artists not only 'minorized' the dominant codes of art photography, but also produced a locally embedded minor form of conceptual art, producing a corpus that creatively deviates from that of the mainly Anglo-Saxon canon of conceptual art.

This book closes with 'Systematic Confusion and the Total Discredit of the World of Reality: Surrealism and Photography in Japan of the 1930s,' Jelena Stojković's essay on deterritorialized forms of Surrealist photography in Japan. Stojković employs the notion of minor photography to offer a more inclusive and affirmative reading of the broad range of photographs that has often been considered in terms of lack: an absence of a 'center' or group that could organize Surrealism's collective action and of the cultural tools to thoroughly understand and interpret the language and program of Surrealism. Rather than remaining within the logic of this relationship of center/periphery, she explores how the deterritorialized language of Surrealism offered the Japanese photographers an escape route from the territorial photographic language that was associated with the propagandistic form of photojournalism supported by the Imperial state apparatus. With Stojković's essay, the voyages undertaken in this volume, from Deleuze and Guattari's writings to photography and back, come temporarily to an end, leaving us with the challenging suggestion that if we want to start thinking in terms of minor photography, understood in an affirmative Deleuzo-Guattarian way, this necessarily implies the writing of minor histories of photography.

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part 1

Towards a Theory of the Minor

1

From Stuttering and Stammering to the Diagram: Towards a Minor Art Practice?

Simon O'Sullivan

Introduction

In my contribution to this edited collection on 'Minor Photography' I am not going to be writing about the second term of the title at all, but rather focusing on the first concept—the minor—and on a couple of other concepts from Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari's writings.[1] That said, inasmuch as my paper explores what might be called a break with representation, its concern might be understood as specifically the photographic insofar as the latter is *the* representational medium. This also means that what I say, for example about the figural, will no doubt have resonances with those photographic practices—post-Surrealism—that attempt to break with this tradition, or perhaps we should say logic, of representation (that we might also call, following Deleuze, the hegemony of the 'cliché'). So, this is all by way of saying that I hope what I offer here in relation to Deleuze and contemporary art will be interesting and perhaps useful in thinking through a notion of 'A Minor Photography.'

So, to be more specific, in this paper I will be concerned with what I am calling the 'glitch,' especially in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the stuttering and stammering characteristics of a minor literature. I will then go on to look at Deleuze's concepts of the figural and probe-head as deployed in the book on Francis Bacon, before turning to a third concept, the diagram, again in relation to Bacon's paintings, which will allow me finally to loop back to my point of departure and to the glitch. In each case I will be interested in a general intention of Deleuze's thought, what we might call the deterritorialization of the human, an intention or orientation that is shared by Bacon. I am also interested in what might be usefully taken from this Deleuze-Bacon encounter for contemporary art practice in general.

Minor Literature

Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a minor literature (at least as it is laid out in *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* from where the following definition has been condensed (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 16-18)) involves three components: 1. The foregrounding of the affective and intensive quality of language or its operation on an asignifying register. A minor literature stutters and stammers the major. It breaks with the operation of 'order words.' It 'stops making sense.' 2. The always already political nature of such literature. A minor literature is always connected to the wider social milieu and not fixated on the domestic/Oedipal. 3. Its specifically collective character. A minor literature is always a collective enunciation. In fact, a minor literature works to pave the way for a community—sometimes a nation—yet to come. This is a minor literature's future orientation.

Each of these components of a minor literature, I would argue, can be 'applied' to contemporary art practice (and I think operate as a corrective to any simple affirmation of 'the new' as it is incarnated in the commodity form). Elsewhere I have attended to the last point that seems to me to be a particularly useful way of thinking through many of the most interesting art practices of today and their mode of 'effectivity' as it were. To briefly repeat that point here: such practices are not made for an already existing audience, but to call forth—or invoke—an audience. They do not offer 'more of the same.' They do not necessarily produce 'knowledge.' They do not offer a reassuring mirror reflection of a subjectivity already in place. With such art 'the people are missing' as Deleuze might say. In fact, I would argue,

the operating field of these practices can be thought of as the future and, as such, the artists in question here operate as kind of prophets. We might even say 'traitor prophets' in that the latter perform a treachery to our more dominant affective/signifying regimes (that is to say, consensual reality).

All of this gives such art a utopian function inasmuch as part of its being is somehow located 'elsewhere.' Importantly, and following Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari, we can understand this as a specifically *immanent* utopia—intrinsically connected to the present, made out of the same materials, the same matter (after all what else is there?) but calling 'for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 108).' This last quotation is from an argument Deleuze and Guattari make in relation to philosophy, and to the creation of concepts, however, it does seem to me that it is equally applicable to a minor literature, and indeed to contemporary art practice (not least given the fact that art practice post-Duchamp has increasingly concerned itself with the conceptual, and indeed, in some cases, with the invention of concepts). In passing, I think we could make the argument that Bacon's paintings are traitor paintings in this sense. Certainly they are *different* to the other objects that surround us and constitute our everyday habitual milieu. Bacon's paintings might be thought of as future-orientated in that they are not merely 'of' the present in the sense of being easily 'readable' by our present subjectivity as is. They call something forth from within us, in fact something that is not just another reading/interpretation of the paintings in question. This affective response or reaction might involve a certain interest or excitement, a point of inspiration perhaps (and Spinoza's notion of a productive, joyful encounter would be pertinent here) but it might also be a certain horror or disgust, even an irritation or boredom perhaps. These last two often mask the fact that something has been encountered that in some way challenges a given subjectivity. They operate as defensive mechanisms. As far as art goes reactions such as these might indicate that we are at a limit point or edge—and that if we can stay with these uncomfortable affects then something, finally, might happen. We might say then that this future orientation of art as I have been calling it opens us up to what we might *become*.

So much for this third modality of a minor literature. Here I want also to focus on the first characteristic of the latter—its operation on an intensive register. To repeat, for Deleuze and Guattari, a minor literature foregrounds asignification or simply the intensive aspects of language. It counteracts the operation of

order-words and the exercise of power this involves by breaking language open to a howling outside/inside. It is these moments of noise—or glitches as we might call them—that free language from itself, at least, from its signifying self, by putting it into contact with other forces. This is an experimentation with, and from within, language. A rupturing of representation. A breaking of the habit of 'making sense,' of 'being human.' We can perhaps begin to see here the connections with Bacon.

In more technical terms such a stuttering and stammering of language operates to produce what I would term an 'affective-event' that in itself can produce what Guattari calls a 'mutant nuclei of subjectification' and thus the possibility of 'res-ingularization' (a reordering of the elements that make up our subjectivity) (Guattari, 1995: 18). In fact, when attending to this event in his own writings Guattari turns to Mikhail Bahktin and writes of the 'detachment of an ethico-aesthetic "partial object" from the field of dominant significations' that 'corresponds both to the promotion of a mutant desire and to the achievement of a certain disin-terestedness (Guattari, 1995: 13).' The partial object here operates as a point of entry into a different incorporeal universe. A point around which a different kind of subjectivity might crystallize. Crucially, and as Guattari remarks, this opera-tion must involve a certain disinterestedness (Guattari is indebted to Kant in this sense). We might say that the listener—or spectator—must respond to the glitch, the affective-event, *as* an event, as the bearer of the potentiality of something else. Put simply, one must, in order that this procedure work, be open to the possibil-ity of something different occurring. This, I think, is crucial. The artwork—or the work that art demands of us—involves an active engagement, a *participation* as it were. Without the latter even the most seemingly radical work will remain inoperative. The glitch then, I would argue, is co-produced through object and subject—in fact, it names a passage between the two. This last point would be to bring Guattari's expanded notion of art briefly laid out above, and indeed the central notion of becoming in *A Thousand Plateaus*, into conjunction with the apparently more conservative 'version' of art given in *What is Philosophy?*, where art is seen as precisely the place of 'a passing between things (Deleuze and Guat-tari, 1994: 173).' As Deleuze and Guattari remark in the latter volume: 'Life alone creates such zones where living beings whirl around, and only art can reach and penetrate them in its enterprise of co-creation (ibid.).'

Deleuze and Guattari's work on the notion of a minor literature and specifically, here, the necessity of stammering and stuttering a major language, or the fore-grounding of what I have been calling the glitch, is then a highly productive text for thinking the field of contemporary art in its conservative and in its more expanded form (we might say, within painting (as we shall see with Bacon) but also within video (that often stutters and stammers 'reality' and indeed the major language of film)). Such affective stammering operates as a kind of singularity that in itself counteracts already existing affective/signifying regimes, whilst at the same time, crucially, opening up a gap within these all too familiar series and circuits of knowledge/information. A gap, which we might also configure here as a form of non-communication. This is to bring art close to what Deleuze calls (and calls for), in his 'Control and Becoming:'

> Maybe speech and communication have become corrupted. They're thor-oughly permeated by money—and not by accident but by their very nature. (…) Creating has always been something different from communi-cating. The key thing might be to create vacuoles of non-communication, circuit breakers so we can elude control (Deleuze, 1995: 175).

Art is not, I would argue, ultimately concerned with knowledge—or, at least, with what passes for knowledge within our everyday knowledge-economy (simply, information). It is not 'useful' in this sense. Indeed, even that art that seeks to produce counter-knowledges can get caught by the very thing it attempts to work against. It necessarily has to work on the same terrain as it were—and thus utilize the same terms. Art, it seems to me, might be better thought of as an event that interrupts knowledge—that breaks information. Indeed, art is one of the very few things we have left that is able to creatively make this break.

We might also understand these moments or rupturing events in Bergsonian terms as opening further the gap between stimulus and response that defines us as human (the complexity of the nervous system, which allows a multiplicity of dif-ferent pathways for stimulus-response, determines a hesitation—or gap—in that response). This is to identify a certain slowness, even a stillness, which might work against the incessant speed of contemporary 'life.' For Bergson, this gap opens us up to the pure past—a kind of ontological background to ourselves. Indeed, it is through this gap that we become creative rather than reactive creatures (Bergson,

1991: 101-102). This is the very definition of freedom, at least freedom from habit or simply the (impasses of the) present plane of existence.

Another way of understanding this potential of the glitch—following Guattari—is that it operates as a point of indeterminacy, and, as such, opens up the possibility of a multiplicity of subsequent pathways and thus a multiplicity of possible worlds. We might say in fact that the glitch always contains within it the germ of a new world. Indeed, I would argue, it is this functioning as a point of indetermination that gives much contemporary art its inspirational, we might even say hopeful tenor. Such glitches—or breaks in the typical—are a kind of reverse-technology in that they offer an escape from the manipulation performed by those other affective assemblages that increasingly operate in a parallel logic to art. I am thinking here of the complex utilization of affect, specifically by the mass media that increasingly operates on a self-consciously affective register—as a kind of nervous system—utilizing the temporally indeterminate aspect of the event in an ever expanding exercise of power (what we might call a politics of pre-emption, or simply, the colonization of the virtual).

We might say then that the glitch names two moments or movements: to break a world and to make a world. In fact these two are never really divorced from one another: to dissent means invariably to affirm somewhere/thing else. To affirm an elsewhere we have to turn from that which is already here. The glitch is then a moment of critique, a moment of negation—but also a moment of creation and of affirmation. Indeed, the glitch—in whichever regime it operates and ruptures—is the 'sound' of this something else, this something *different* attempting to get through. To end this first part of my paper then we can return to the artist as the one who specifically uses this logic of the glitch. The artist as traitor prophet names a twin orientation: the betrayal of one world and the affirmation of a world-yet-to-come.

Deleuze-Bacon

I want now to shift sideways, before returning to this idea of stuttering and of the glitch, and look at Deleuze's book on the painter Francis Bacon and at a number of concepts Deleuze 'invents' there to think Bacon's paintings. As with my remarks on minor literature I am particularly interested here in how these

concepts—and the paintings themselves—attempt to undo representation, and how we might extend their workings to the field of contemporary art in general.

Firstly then, the *figural*. The figural for Deleuze-Bacon is that which deforms, or does violence to, the figurative. We can understand the latter here as the typical way we are represented and represent ourselves within the world. Those forms that reassure us of our identity. Indeed, for Deleuze, representation is not solely a type of art as it were but the very means by which we constitute ourselves as an organism and as a subject in the world. To quote Deleuze:

> If representation is related to an object, this relation is derived from the form of representation; if this object is the organism and organization, it is because the form of representation is first of all organic in itself, it is because the form of representation first of all expresses the organic life of the man as subject (Deleuze, 2003: 126).

The figural achieves this disruption, firstly, through a mechanism of isolation; the figure is presented as a 'matter-of-fact,' detached from narration or any illustrative function. To quote Deleuze again:

> Isolating the figure will be the primary requirement. The figurative (representation) implies the relationship of an image to an object that it is supposed to illustrate; but it also implies the relationship of an image to other images in a composite whole which assigns a specific object to each of them. Narration is the correlate of illustration. A story slips into, or tends to slip into, the space between the two figures in order to animate the illustrated whole (ibid.: 3).

Isolation then is a method for breaking with a certain use of images in our world—the way in which they tend to be mobilized for a certain end, almost always to sell us something (witness advertising). In passing, and with a nod to Guattari's writings on the Readymade, we might expand this requirement of isolation out to the wider field of contemporary art in general. An object might be detached from its habitual mode of circulation and specifically its position within capitalist relations of exchange. We might say simply, that it is, in one sense, rendered inoperative, placed as it is within the frame of art.

However, to return to Bacon, this isolation is only one moment in a process, for the isolated figure also operates as a point of departure for deterritorializations, for

a moving beyond the figure. In this sense the figural is a kind of in-between the figurative and the non-figurative. Put differently the figural involves a *becoming* of the figure. A becoming animal ('in place of formal correspondences what Bacon's painting constitutes is a *zone of indiscernability or undecideability* between man and animal (ibid.: 21)'), and ultimately a becoming imperceptible ('whatever its importance becoming-animal is only one stage in a more profound becoming-imperceptible in which the figure disappears (ibid.: 27)').

To return to my digression on the Readymade, and following Guattari once more, we might say that the object isolated from a given series works as a trigger point to open up other incorporeal universes of value (and no doubt, given the increasing emphasis on productivity and speed within our information age this isolation and opening will involve the type of slowness I mentioned above). Hence Guattari's understanding of the Readymade—laid out in his essay 'Ritornellos and Existential Affects'—as that object which has been taken out of a normal series thus allowing the latter to be put to work in a different manner:

> Marcel Duchamp's *Bottlerack* functions as the trigger for a constellation of referential universes engaging both intimate reminiscences (the cellar of the house, a certain winter, the rays of light upon spider's webs, adolescent solitude) and connotations of a cultural or economic order—the time when bottles were still washed with the aid of a bottle wash (...) (Guattari, 1996: 164).

It is this power of art to access these other universes and other times away from a narrow and alienated present that, we might say, is the *time of art*.

Secondly, *probe-heads*. We can see the above becoming-animal in relation to Bacon's treatment of heads where, in the terms of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Bacon attempts to disrupt the processes of faciality, understood here as that abstract machine of modernity that produces signifiance (the white wall) and subjectification (the black hole). To quote Deleuze and Guattari from the latter volume:

> (...) if human beings have a destiny, it is rather to escape the face, to dismantle the face and facializations, to become imperceptible, to become clandestine, not by returning to animality, nor even by returning to the head, but by spiritual and special becomings-animal, by strange true becomings that get past the wall and get out of the black holes (...) (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 171).

Bacon's heads are probe-heads in this precise sense, lines of escape from the face and from faciality. Crucially, they are not a return to some kind of primitive pre-faciality. They are in fact an escape that takes place from within the terrain of the face itself, a kind of stammering from within. Of course, probe-heads need not necessarily be pictures of heads but rather any device that disrupts faciality, for the latter applies not just to heads but to all of the mechanisms that produce significance and subjectivity (from faces and landscapes within painting to facialization and lanscapification within the world). To quote Deleuze and Guattari once more:

> You will be pinned to the white wall and stuffed in the black hole. This machine is called the faciality machine because it is the social production of the face, because it performs the facialization of the entire body and all its surroundings and objects, and the landscapification of all worlds and milieus (ibid.: 181).

A probe-head is then that which explores the terrain beyond the face, the terrain from which the face is nothing more than an extraction or crystallization. Probe-heads are in this sense a move into chaos. Probe-heads are those devices 'that dismantle the strata in their wake, break through walls of signifiance, pour out of the holes of subjectivity, fell trees in favor of veritable rhizomes, and steer the flows down lines of positive deterritorialization or creative flight (ibid.: 190).' They are, however, not just destructive, but, as the name suggests, productive of other, stranger and more fluid modes of organization:

> Beyond the face lies an altogether different inhumanity: no longer that of the primitive head, but of 'probe-heads'; here, cutting edges of deterritorialization become operative and lines of deterritorialization positive and absolute, forming strange new becomings, new polyvocalities (ibid.: 190-191).

Probe-heads as well as being a name for Bacon's portraits (and indeed his other paintings) might also be a useful name for more experimental, non-traditional art practices, or indeed for other practices—of living differently—not normally considered 'art.' Such practices might not seem to be de-facializations, but with the systems of facialization becoming increasingly complex (one thinks here again of the mass media and especially of new communications technologies) then the lines of flight from these will themselves become increasingly complex and unfamiliar, as will the territories produced on the other side of the 'white wall.' A case study of this new production of subjectivity might be collective and collaborative practices,

those that deliberately dissent—or simply turn away from—the production of individualist and atomized subjectivities and other typical capitalist formations.

Importantly, probe-heads do not arrive from some other place. They are in fact made from the same stuff as faces. Indeed we might say that the same (capitalist) machines that produce probe-heads also produce faces. The latter being subjectivities and assemblages that are 'useful,' the former often appearing as redundancies or dead ends. We have here a definition of sorts of art: it involves a kind of super-productivity arising from what appears, on the face of it as it were, to be non productive.

Third, and finally, the *diagram*. For Deleuze-Bacon it is the diagram that enables this deterritorialization of the face and the production of the Body without Organs (the latter understood here as that which lies 'under' the organism/organization (Deleuze, 2003: 50)). In painting, and specifically Bacon's painting, the diagram involves the making of random marks that allow the figural to emerge from the figure. 'The diagram is (...) the operative set of asignifying and nonrepresentative lines and zones, line-strokes and color-patches (ibid.: 101).' We might apply this rule of the diagram to other kinds of modern and contemporary art—practices that necessarily involve this play with chance, this contact and utilization with that which goes beyond conscious control, if only to circumnavigate the reproduction of just-more-of-the-same. It would be an interesting project to identify how specific artists incorporate this lack of control 'into' their practice, or simply, how they contact and somehow 'use' that which is outside them 'selves.' How, for example, they might mobilize chance (and perhaps error) in the production of something new.

Here random occurrences are ontologically constitutive of art (and not an accident that befalls it). Indeed, an art practice—rather than a practice that just produces products—is always open to an outside in this sense. It needs to have a certain cohesiveness and form, but equally must be able to access a certain formlessness as it were (simply put, it must have points of collapse). It is in this sense that art can never be wholly predetermined or worked out in advance but must involve this productive encounter with chaos (it is also in this sense that the artist seeks to make work that speaks back to him or her as it were, or, in the painter Gerhard Richter's terms, 'that something will emerge that is unknown to me, which I could not plan, which is better, cleverer, than I am (Richter quoted in Gidal, 1993: 47)').

The diagram is then 'a chaos, a catastrophe, but it is also a germ of order or rhythm. It is a violent chaos in relation to the figurative givens, but it is a germ of rhythm in relation to the new order of the painting (Deleuze, 2003: 102).' The diagram is rhythm emerging from chaos, the manipulation of chance to suggest the 'emergence of another world (ibid.: 100).' Again, all sorts of art practices might be said to produce rhythmic worlds in this sense, worlds hitherto unseen but always produced from within the seen. Art is the production of worlds (the figural) that sit between that which is known (the figurative) and that which is unknown (chaos): '(...) the law of the diagram, according to Bacon, is this: one starts with a figurative form, a diagram intervenes and scrambles it, and a form of a completely different nature emerges from the diagram, which is called the Figure (ibid.: 156).' Art, when it really is art, is always located at the edge of things in this sense. It faces, as it were, in two directions. It is a bridge, or again, a *passage* between.

This is, however, not all without its dangers. Indeed, for Deleuze-Bacon there are two 'wrong' positions as it were, which the middle way of the figural must avoid. Figuration (narration and illustration, which is to say representation) but also the *absolute* deterritorialization of the figure (the move to total abstraction). We might call these the twin dangers of moving *too* slow—of remaining within representation, but also of moving too fast—and ultimately following a line of abolition. Figuration operates through 'cliché,' understood as that which surrounds us every day: 'We are besieged by photographs that are illustrations, by newspapers that are narrations, by cinema-images, by television-images (ibid.: 87).' These are the clichés—physical, though there are also psychic ones ('ready-made perceptions, memories, phantasms (ibid.)') that fill the canvas even before the artist has dipped his brush (for Deleuze-Bacon, unlike Clement Greenberg for example, the canvas is not empty, but always already full, teeming as it were with virtualities). Another way of understanding these 'clichés' is as habits; habits of sight—and also of thought. Art opposes the latter with its own logic of difference.

The other way, abstraction, can be divided further into two tendencies: 1. Pure or geometric abstraction, which elevates the optical and ultimately returns to figuration inasmuch as it contains a code (visual and spiritual) or, to say the same differently, passes through the brain (as is the case, Deleuze argues, with Kandinsky) (ibid.: 104-105). In this regard, the same criticism can be made against both figurative painting and abstract painting: 'they pass through the brain, they do not act directly on the nervous system, they do not attain the sensation, they do not

liberate the Figure - all because they remain at *one and the same level* (ibid.: 36).'
This is a signifying art waiting to be read. 2. Action painting, as paradigmatically
the case with Jackson Pollock, that provides an all-over diagram (a purely haptic
space) but in so doing, according to Deleuze-Bacon loses its capacity to act on our
nervous system (such painting is not controlled enough) (ibid.: 109). The figural
avoids these, although it is, according to Deleuze, no less radical in its own 'path.'

In concluding this second part of my paper we might say then that the figural
involves a not-too-fast but also a not-too-slow deterritorialization of the figure—a
rupturing of the latter so as to allow something else to 'appear,' or to be 'heard'
'behind' the figure as it were. The figural might seem less radical than other avant-
garde techniques, other attempts at bringing art into life (one thinks here of not
just the many movements of modernism but also of their stuttering and stam-
mering manifestos...). There is indeed a cautious aspect to Bacon's practice of
painting—a certain control that accompanies the wildness. The same might be
said of Deleuze who, in his writings, practices an 'art of dosages.' It might be
argued however that it is only through this caution, through this careful engage-
ment with the matter of representation, that the line of flight from representation
can be actually located. To quote Deleuze and Guattari themselves specifically on
this methodological point:

> This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment
> with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous point on it, find
> potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experi-
> ence them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums
> of intensity segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times.
> It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in free-
> ing lines of flight (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 161).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we might say that the figural within Bacon parallels Deleuze's own
philosophical project (and even more particularly the joint project with Guattari
as laid out in *A Thousand Plateaus*) of thinking beyond the human. The human
is to be understood here as a habitual mode of being (a *representational* mode).
Both projects do not involve a simple abandoning of the figure or of the human

(that is, a complete disruption/abolition), but a kind of stretching or twisting of it. A rupturing that allows for the releasing of forces from within and the contact of forces that are without (both in fact being the same operation). Both Bacon and Deleuze are specifically mannerist in this sense (Deleuze, 2003: 161). Both are interested in accessing the figural 'behind' the figure; the invisible 'behind' the visible. We are now in a position to attempt an articulation of the connections between the notion of the diagram in painting and the intensive functioning of a minor literature: both involve a stuttering and stammering—of the figurative, of language—of representational modes. Both also involve the utilization of these glitches as points of indeterminacy that might finally allow something new, something different, to emerge. Indeed, both, although specific in many senses to Kafka's writings and to Bacon's paintings are, I think, incredibly productive concepts, not least in thinking through the effectivity of the expanded field of contemporary art practice—that, of course, includes photography—as it exists today.

I want however to end my paper with a final question—or coda—specifically on photography and the minor and which perhaps highlights a limitation in what I have said up until now: If stuttering and stammering are the mode in which literature becomes minor, and the figural and diagram are painting's specifically minor mode—then what might be the character—or components—of a specifically minor photography? Put simply, what is the photograph's glitch? It seems to me that here a turn is required away from the notion of the minor as it has already been deployed in Deleuze, and indeed by myself, towards photography and to its own specificity. Indeed, I take this to be one of the intentions of this edited collection—to excavate a minor tradition of photography that is particular to it as a medium and as a practice. In such an enquiry and exploration it seems to me that the very definition of the minor (and possibly of photography also) will necessarily change.

Notes

[1] In what follows I draw heavily on my previous article 'From Stuttering and Stammering to the Diagram: Deleuze, Bacon and Contemporary Art Practice,' *Deleuze Studies*, 3, 2, (December, 2009): 247-275.

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2

Tichý as a Maverick: Singular Figure of a Minor Photography?

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Translation to English: Damien Suboticki

Photography is often described as a minor art, an expression that refers both to its precariousness and its non-canonical nature.

(Schaeffer, 1987: 157)

For a long time, photography's versatility of use made it the subject of an artistic depreciation. In contemporary photography, the forms coming under visual arts have become increasingly *canonical.* They are the result of a slow and complex process of historical construction stemming from the critical work of elaborating new assessment criteria, such as that of documentary value. Identified and authoritatively prescribed as new norms, these criteria have enabled to transcend the hierarchies that had been undermining its practice. Photography was also characterized by another hierarchy, this time internal, which proceeded from another system of norms disqualifying amateur practices. Certain common uses of the image—whether private, popular, anonymous or domestic…—reinforce, question and sometimes eventually reverse the artistic uncertainty inherent to the medium as it is emphasized in the epigraph above. As a sign of this reversal, in photography the

amateur style now belongs to the possible expressive repertoire of the artist. Yet these various receptions are still surrounded by uncertainty and heavily dependent on the context of presentation, most notably on the argumentative and textual environment of the art world. Does this persistent *precariousness* typify a minor form proper to photography?

In its own peculiar way, the work of Czech photographer Miroslav Tichý,[1] both surprising in its singularity and fast as to its international recognition, could provide an answer to this question. Its belated arrival on the art market is only explained by the consistency and timely reception of a skillfully-orchestrated construction. The fact that the artist himself didn't play an active part in its diffusion, and indeed was quite indifferent to it, is truly startling. His marginal relationship to the art establishment and market, his unorthodox photographic technique, to say the least, the thematic obsession that shows through his pictures, as well as the artistic posture adopted by Roman Buxbaum, the first collector of his work, and later on by the influent curator Harald Szeemann, justify this connection with the minor forms observed in literature. After rising to fame in the course of a few years, Tichý still holds to this day a unique place within contemporary art.

Ever since Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's study on Franz Kafka (1986), the notion of minor literature has established itself in the field of research situated at the crossroads of linguistics and sociology. Yet there is nothing too self-evident in the transposition of this notion into the field of the image, which suggests the possibility of a *minor photography*. To support this assumption, it may be necessary to trace back its genealogy from Kafka's very own first text appearing in his *Diaries* and to follow Deleuze and Guattari's stylistic circumlocutions on Kafka's writings in their essay of 1975 (for the original), but also to extend this first development to a series of texts which led them, after five years of successive elaborations, to the idea of 'becoming-intense' discussed in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Our intention here is to link the effects that characterize these various conceptions of minor literatures with the photographic practice taken on by Miroslav Tichý. But first and foremost, a quick description of his work is essential.

A Belated Discovery

When curator Harald Szeemann chose him as an entrant in the Seville Biennial in 2004, Tichý was still virtually unknown as an artist. Aged 78, he had even ceased all activity as a photographer for around fifteen years. After he was discovered, his pictures received wide editorial coverage thanks to collective or monographic exhibitions, in the form of catalogs featuring critical texts as well as newspaper articles or essays. He was the subject of two documentaries released on DVD, and two websites—one being that of a foundation dedicated to the conservation and promotion of his work—were officially unveiled.[2] These documents build up the story of a discovery. The latest editorial opus to date is a voluminous catalog published for the exhibition held in 2010 at the International Center of Photography in New York. This testimony echoes like a true consecration, which could only be crowned by a future and hypothetical catalogue raisonné.[3] With more than three hundred pages, this austere and splendid book has a rigid cloth-bound black cover pasted with three photographs (almost originals). Tichý's name appears on the cloth in a discrete embossing of black capital letters printed in matching tones. The choice of format enables to reproduce the pictures *to scale*, each of them being identified with an inventory number. Throughout this biographical journey, the richness of Tichý's visuals perfectly illustrates the text of psychiatrist and collector Roman Buxbaum placed at the end of the book. This well-crafted publication, definitive in its looks and as close as it gets to a portfolio, aims at celebrating part
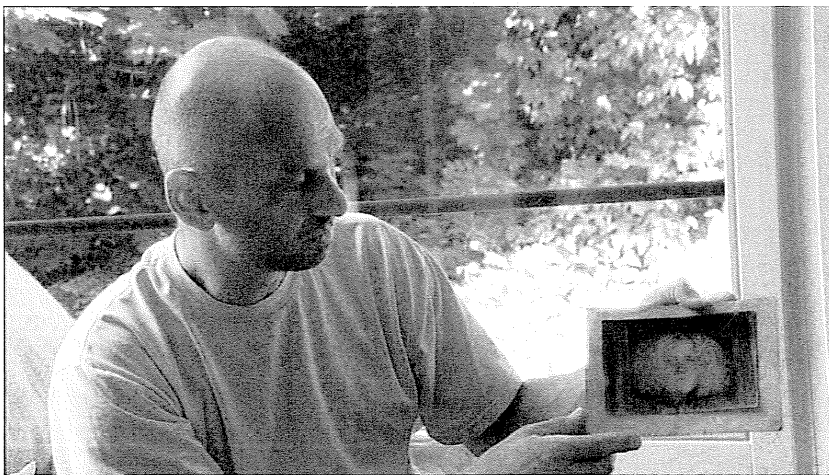

Fig. 1 Roman Buxbaum showing young Jana Hebnarova's picture, still from the documentary film Worldstar, 2007. © Nataša von Kopp.

of the mystery surrounding the artist's persona, and is intended for readers who are familiar with his work.

From Seville to New York, from discovery to fame, what journey did these pictures go through before reaching us? What strategies and accompanying discourses have combined to ensure the consistency and guide the aesthetic reception of Tichý's work since its late discovery? Among the number of publications that came to complement the exhibitions, Marc Lenot rightly proposes to consider it a genuine invention (Lenot, 2009a).

Various discourses of contextualization have contributed to this rapidly-acquired visibility. The one with mythological inclinations, easily identified by its incantatory and repetitive nature, is attributable to Roman Buxbaum, discoverer and main collector of Tichý's work, who in his youth used to be a neighbor. His legitimacy as a conveyor is reinforced by a biographical link and by the anteriority of his informal contacts with the artist. Other more traditional arguments are seeking legitimacy through cultural bonds. Curators or historians identify artistic precedents, if not true ties, but insist on the absolute singularity of Tichý's work. There is also a scientific, analytic and distantiated discourse which aims at explaining how this artist became famous in spite of himself. In this regard, this is the standpoint adopted by Marc Lenot, who may be the most informed specialist in France (Lenot, 2009b). This polyphony finally gives way to a less common, friendly discourse which owes its irreplaceable quality to a personal acquaintance with the artist, but does not necessarily bear any mythological connotation. This is the tone of Nataša von Kopp in her documentary film *Worldstar*,[4] which also shows the attitude of neighbor Jana Hebnarova,[5] described as benevolent and disinterested (fig.1). This interweaving of discourses is not devoid of tensions when the interests at stake differ. Some are now palpable over the issues of copyrights, their ownership and the legitimacy of their transfer being surrounded with controversy as a result of Miroslav Tichý's singular personality and his keeping out of his own artistic promotion.[6] The issue here is to put the notion of minor photography to the test on the basis of its definitions in literature. These various registers of texts will thus rather be useful information sources than exhibits in a potential legal dispute.

Oddly enough, these discourses witnessed the apparition of an existential thesis, some writers insisting indeed on proving the character was real… As pointed out

by curator Pavel Vančát, the hypothesis of an imaginary photographer and the pos-
sibility of a fabrication were in people's minds during the first exhibition dedicated
to his work at the Kunsthaus Zürich in 2005 (Vančát and Buxbaum, 2006: 5).[7]
This hypothesis was reinforced by the fact that the artist was not physically present
at the preview, and by the highly improbable nature of the cameras, if not of the
pictures. As shown by the documents reproduced in this essay, the photographic
cameras displayed, made of wood and cardboard and assembled with sticky tape
and rubber bands, are truly astounding (fig.2). Infinitely more rustic than the most
primitive daguerreian room, they can easily hold their own against today's most
unsophisticated pinhole cameras! These improbable *home-made* objects do not
even remotely look like any other known model or craft prototype, but rather like
child's toys, cobbled together hastily in order to imitate a reflex camera, with its
telephoto lens worthy of a reporter photographer. This is the impression reported
by the inhabitants of Kyjov, where Tichý used to live and practice every day:
they didn't believe these strange devices could really work.[8] As of the blurry pic-
tures, badly-centered subjects, prints covered with dust and scratches, sometimes
overexposed or conversely very dark, printed without great care and in totally

Fig. 2 Camera
constructed by Miroslav
Tichý. © Roman
Buxbaum.

Fig. 3 Miroslav Tichý, MT Inv. no.: 4-3-68. © Courtesy of Foundation Tichý Ocean.

random formats, stained with inadequate chemicals, naively framed in cardboard and sometimes illuminated with a ball-point pen (pl.1), everything seems to have been gathered with a view to establishing a catalog of faults and defying the canons of the picture, supposed to be in accordance with the rules and common practices dictated by the procedural rigidity and implicit of an elementary technical expertise. In the samples exhibited and duplicated, women are Tichý's main subject of interest (fig.3-4), to the point where they become his obsession: outdoors, at the swimming pool in summer, out of reach behind the wire fences that often stand in his way (fig.5-6, pl.2). The absence of a direct eye contact is often the sign of a lack of complicity, indicating a furtive capture occurring from a distance. Scanning lines and more suggestive and erotic poses sometimes suggest the shots were taken from a television screen, adding up to this voyeuristic collection (fig.3-7).[9] Such pictures, neither the result of a harmonious relationship with the model nor of a will to acquire a certain aesthetic mastery of light or a mastery of the here and now, fall within a nearly experimental protocol that borders on the most expected figurative and descriptive codes and uses. These apparent inaccuracies, resulting from deliberate choices, can be helpfully related to a literary category thanks to Kafka's first text.

Minor Literature According to Kafka

On Christmas Day, 1911, Kafka drew up in his diaries a provisional inventory of the advantages of a literature that would not be dominated by a handful of great talents, a literature he described as 'minor.' This parallel with major literature, in this case that of German language which was dominant in the works of fiction published in Prague or Warsaw, sprang from two examples: Yiddish and Czech

literatures. In addition to their relative differences, limited to linguistic or stylistic issues, Kafka sought to identify the characteristics that were common to the various literatures from minority communities. This is a lengthy, contradictory and at times ironical inventory, which remains quite incomplete and elliptic in the details of its argumentation. Besides, as French translator Claude David warns in the critical notes of Kafka's *Œuvres complètes* published in the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 'the outline, already not too clear in German, is likely to be very difficult to understand in translation (David, 1984: 1353).' It is, according to him, no more than 'notes hastily jotted down (ibid.).' It is thus with great caution that I deliver here the main elements of this first definition. In these literatures of vernacular or nearly mythical languages—Czech and Yiddish respectively, with the latter borrowing from Hebrew—Kafka notes an increasing vitality and a greater independence of the writers, all of whom are equally respected. To him the lack of a model and subsequent absence of a hierarchy seem salutary, in which case he is probably thinking of Goethe, whose shadow remains paralyzing. More generally, this situation encourages the authors who write in a minor language to be more demanding. The non-talented imitators are turned away in their search for tutelary figures, as these are fortunately lacking here. Closer to the people, more accessible in reading, less intimidating, these literatures also carry a stronger impetus. As a consequence they give rise to new vocations and contribute to the development of the publishing market. Ordinary subjects find their place and political questions have a hold over these literary forms, sometimes excessively. A three-point outline then defines the frame for an ensuing study that comes as a summary of his previous intention. These literatures are more vivid, controversial and lively, they are free of some particular restrictions or weights and as a result more open, and finally they are more popular, that is more in tune with literary history and politics. All these features give minor literatures a certain edge over the major forms, even if Kafka qualifies his words by describing it as a thin edge.

Despite the difficulties of translating this text from the German, Kafka essentially stresses what we could now call the *identity virtues of cultural communities*, reinforced by the literatures from linguistic minorities. Being more localized, these literatures enjoy an independence that gives them greater creative freedom and relieves them from the weight of historical models. Such stimulating literary forms are stylistically more straightforward and tend to address popular themes.

The minor literature thus defined by Kafka somewhat calls to mind the practice of amateur photographers, especially those belonging to the category of *expert* photographers which appeared in the 19th century, and which Pierre Bourdieu also identified a hundred years later as that of the passionate photographers, the 'devotees or deviants (Bourdieu, 1996: 39).' Overshadowed by a major form that was first professional but more importantly distinct from the dominant domestic and occasional use, they benefited from an uninhibited and lively emulation. As pointed out by Clément Chéroux (Chéroux, 2007), they organized themselves in clubs as early as the 1870s whenever made possible by the technology, in which they had a keen interest—unlike the simple amateurs, i.e. the *users* who were satisfied with the industrial service Kodak went on to provide for decades, and who primarily found motivation in the family ritual in the century that followed. On the other hand, in the absence of a defined *leader*, the discussions occurring at the Photo-Club revived the practice of expert amateurs. Much like the minor literature identified by Kafka, they illustrate a socialization lying upon an aesthetically-based visual production and maintained by the free and lively exchanges it creates.

From this first point of view, Miroslav Tichý's approach isn't totally irrelevant to that of an ardent but rather individualistic amateur who would wish to reach by himself a form of primitive expertise. As Buxbaum remarks, after a brief introduction to photography by a painter friend[10] he started making his own lenses and enlarger, even though according to the collector: 'it was not that he could not afford to buy cameras. He possessed a large equipment of 35mm and middle format cameras (Buxbaum, 2008a: 132).' He thus did so neither by default nor for want of anything: these cobble-jobs are an actual part of the experience, the project being dependent on them. With profuse details, Buxbaum goes on to assert in an even more radical manner:

> His way of working seems almost primitive, but he wouldn't have managed without an intimate knowledge of the laws of optics. He made [his lenses] out of materials he found lying around (…) out of old eye-glasses (…) He cut his own lenses out of Plexiglas with a knife, and then polished them with sandpaper, toothpaste and cigarette ash (…) He also used a children's telescope (…) Thanks to his rough handling of the material, the female figures emerge from a soft, Impressionist light as if by miracle (ibid.: 134).

Buxbaum makes use of the paradox by juxtaposing what seems like two incompatible postures: that of scientific knowledge and that of a magical apparition of religious nature. Like an alchemist, Tichý transfigures the world with a modest and prosaic device. Until we know more about his cameras—now relics in exhibitions—thanks to a potential rigorous analysis of their performances, Tichý's resolute attitude remains unmistakable. Conscious of his artistic program, he claimed during a meeting with his patron and discoverer:

> A mistake, a mistake. That's what makes the poetry, gives it the painterly quality…Of course it worked imprecisely. That was perhaps the art (…) First of all, you have to have a bad camera! If you want to be famous, you have to do something so badly that no one else in the world does it as badly! Not so nicely, beautifully elaborate; no one is interested in that (ibid.: 135).

By building his photographic cameras and mastering in his own risky way every stage in the postproduction, Tichý asserted himself as a radically independent artist—therefore implicitly fostering his wish for recognition. For more than thirty years he obstinately created the practical conditions for the transformation of his daily obsession—a true scopic drive—into fleeting visions. Aside from the collective dimension and the emulation of a group, which are absent here, his freedom and independence embody the idea of a potential minor practice of photography based on the model of the passionate amateur, in the noble sense identified by Franz Kafka among the literatures of minor language. His refusal of conjugal life brings him even closer to Kafka. Besides, as Bourdieu claimed in his sociological study of photography, 'fanatical photographers occur more frequently among bachelors (Bourdieu, 1996: 41).' This biographical parallel seems to divert us from the linguistic considerations on the minor character of literatures. But whatever artistic

Fig. 4 Miroslav Tichý, MT Inv. no.: 10-1-79. © Courtesy of Foundation Tichý Ocean.

choices the writer and this particular photographer make can't be dissociated from the choices they make in their lives.

Tichý and the Idea of a Minor Photography

When reading Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's essay on minor literature, the tension between major and minor isn't solely a matter of linguistic minority, but falls within a reality inherent to the act of writing, a fact of style, which primarily concerns Kafka's own writing. By considering his use of the German language up to his own thoughts on the literatures of minor language, they operate a true reversal: 'A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 16).' This free borrowing of the concept enables them to apply, in a reflexive manner, the notion to the work of Kafka, who seemed to pay much attention to marginal literary forms. Does this second, explicitly reflexive redirection enable to confirm the use of the word *minor* to describe Tichý's artistic practice? Does the picture also 'allow (…) [him] to challenge the language and mak[e] it follow a sober revolutionary path (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 19)?' Let's study more precisely the elements of Tichý's biography in the light of Deleuze and Guattari's vision of Kafka, as suggested when they say that 'living and writing, art and life, are opposed only from the point of view of a major literature (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 41).'

Apart from the etymological sense suggested above, Miroslav Tichý is not strictly speaking an amateur artist. From 1945, he followed a three-year course in drawing and painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. Therefore his subsequent dedication to photography, which he taught himself after a brief introduction, was a continuation of his pictorial work through other means and another field of production of icons. A new practice he justified by saying 'The paintings were already painted, the drawings drawn. What was I supposed to do (Buxbaum, 2008a: 132)?' During his life, his artistic activity was determined by a succession of breaks that were so many opportunities and constraints: his exclusion from the art school of Prague in 1948, his strange disappearance one day before the opening of a paintings exhibition he dodged in November 1957, which led him to the asylum, and above all the loss of the painter's studio he had been occupying since the mid-1950s in the house of Roman Buxbaum's grandparents. This latter development was crucial to his involvement in an intensive practice. Buxbaum

reveals: 'In 1972 MT was evicted from the studio in my grandmother's house, after the house was taken away from her by the socialist nationalization (ibid.: 131).' Deprived of his studio, he left the territory of painting and took over that of photography, accomplishing somewhat of a strict program along his everyday wanderings in the city: 'One hundred photos a day. That happened automatically without any effort on my part (ibid.: 133),' he claimed. In the face of these real deterritorializations, the photographer's daily journeys and quests, initiated at the beginning of the 1960s, intensified after 1972 up to the end of the 1980s. Taking place in a familiar environment, this obsessive psychological reconstruction is like an insistent and repeated reterritorialization over his native city of Kyjov. Isn't this deterritorialization and subsequent reterritorialization one of the characteristics of minor literatures according to Deleuze and Guattari?

These various events are also directly linked to the political context. The reopening of the art school of Prague, which benefited Tichý, coincided precisely with the end of World War II and the re-forming of Czechoslovakia, whereas his later exclusion was the result of the Stalinist communists taking over the country during the Czech coup of 1948. When the authorities banned drawing courses from live nude models, he refused to play into the government's hands, which forced students to draw heroic depictions of workers. Regarded as a dissident and considered undesirable, he was excluded (Buxbaum, 2008b: 30). Another direct political implication can be seen in the crucial loss of his studio, requisitioned for the creation of a machine shop. Roman Buxbaum also mentions how Tichý was systematically confined to the asylum before every folklore celebration or national holiday, just to prevent any potential disturbance of law and order by his sloppy appearance, far from the communist ideals. Tichý recalled how they once forgot to pick him up on May Day while he was obediently waiting to be taken away. He then decided, in a provocative gesture, to sit on the stairs of the church front where everybody could see him, and was logically arrested (ibid.: 36). In his whole life he allegedly spent a total of eight years in jail or in the asylum. After the fall of the Berlin Wall at the end of 1989 and the emergence of a new political order, he eventually put an end to his compulsive activity as a street photographer. These correlations could be mere coincidences, but it seems they actually had a deep influence on his choices and stands. Quoting again Deleuze and Guattari's text on Kafka, it is possible to assert that in the case of Miroslav Tichý, 'each individual intrigue (…) connect[s] immediately to politics

Fig. 5 Miroslav Tichý,
MT Inv. no.: 7-2-54.
© Courtesy of Foundation
Tichý Ocean.

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 17).' This political implication, which was Deleuze and Guattari's second criterion for the identification of this form of literature in Kafka, is ubiquitous in Tichý's official biography and reinforces the idea of a possible minor practice of photography.

Finally, Tichý's relative loneliness in his practice must not be extrapolated to his social life, as the sociability networks he belonged to were actually more substantial than the first biographical elements imply. Insisting on Tichý's position as an extremely unconventional figure, as an 'outsider among the outsiders (Buxbaum, 1989)' according to the title of his first critical text, Buxbaum places him within the marginal production of outsider art. Yet various signs attest to the existence of these solidarity networks. On the one hand, the artist entrusted part of his photographic production to Roman Buxbaum during his visits in Kyjov in the 1980s, and to his neighbor Jana Hebnarova.[11] On the other hand, the local community tolerated his presence and let him proceed as he pleased. In some pictures, which are only too few, eye contact with the female models suggests an amused complicity at the moment of the shot. But does that make him the spokesman of a community? This would be an excessive claim, but the peaceful atmosphere of the pictures and the idle hedonism prevailing in the most exhibited photographs contrast with the depiction of the austere reality of the communist world

in the 1960s-1970s. Through this utterly unusual and dreamlike representation of everyday life, Miroslav Tichý anticipated the fall of the Berlin Wall and freed himself from the restrictive and repressive rules of the government. Therefore it doesn't really matter if this community he would represent currently exists as such. The only thing that matters is its potential becoming. Just as Kafka in his animal stories, by his wanderings through the city Tichý 'was drawing lines of escape; but he didn't 'flee the world.' Rather, it was the world and its representation that he *made take flight* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 46-47).' Even when resulting from a 'solitary singularity (ibid.: 83),' the new statement sought by the artist of minor forms is highly dependent on its context. Implicitly, it still expresses a collective desire. This third and last aspect is characteristic of the minor literary forms identified in Deleuze and Guattari and corresponds to the absence of a subject, replaced by a 'collective assemblage of enunciation (ibid.: 18).' If we admit that the attention and interest given to Tichý's fugitive, indistinct and powerful pictures are inseparable from a chain of solidarity that brings them to our eyes and up to the picture rails in a gallery or to a printed book, then the *statements* issued through the spoken equivalents of these pictures can be reduced neither to the shots nor to the original photographic prints. Such a chain extends to the collection compiled by Hebnarova, to its partial acquisition by the Tichý Ocean Foundation, and to the extreme care with which Buxbaum makes it public, has it reproduced and accompanies its visibility with the help of the various actors from the art world. That this collective assemblage manages quite happily without its author certainly makes it an exceptional case, but doesn't rule out the possibility to describe it as a minor photographic practice.

A Becoming-Minoritarian, a Becoming-Intense

In the essay on Kafka, minor literature does not stem from the application of a norm, but from the convergence of three signs: one has to identify a situation of deterritorialization, to be faced with a strong political implication, and to find in the project a collective dimension—even if it is only virtual (ibid.: 18). Where Kafka described in his *Diaries* the paradoxical advantages of a modest literature consequent upon a normalized hierarchy (a situation of linguistic minority and a supposed lack of recognition of popular themes), Deleuze and Guattari described a becoming, more of a process than a state. The general application of a

value criterion to a disparate group enables to distinguish its components and to organize them hierarchically. According to the criterion chosen, a normalization (which suggests a certain relationship to power) separates the homogenous from the heterogeneous, the dominant from the dominated, the big from the small, or the major from the minor. In order to avoid this practice of normative judgment applied from the outside, Deleuze then proposed to define a third term, or rather an orientation: the *minoritarian*. He insisted on the importance of the operation that produces it, i.e. the process of minorization, and explained in 1978 in an article of the review *Critique*: 'we must distinguish between: the majoritarian as a constant and homogeneous system; minorities as *subsystems*; and the minoritarian as a potential, creative and created, becoming (Deleuze, 1978: 154-155).'[12] With this quote we follow a recent philosophical observation by Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc, who considers the text on Kafka as a mere starting point for the more general study of Deleuze's theory of norms (Sibertin-Blanc, 2003). This notion, which he goes on to develop within the field of literature, was only completed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, in which they finally identified the minoritarian as occurring when the writer manages:

> To be a foreigner, but in one's own tongue (…) That is when language becomes intensive, a pure continuum of values and intensities. That is when all of language becomes secret, yet has nothing to hide, as opposed to when one carves out a secret subsystem within language. One attains this result only by sobriety, creative subtraction (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 98).

The means to reach such sobriety, such 'becoming-intense (ibid.: 232-309),' presuppose an intentionally incorrect adjustment of the syntax, an uneven treatment of the vocabulary, a contrasted and dissonant assemblage of sonorities, and a search for surprising effects of meaning. Where the major becoming of language enables to extract constants from it, which correspond to the 'neutral and transparent element of established meanings and designations (Sibertin-Blanc, 2003: 17),' its minor work consists on the contrary in 'placing it in continuous variation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 106).' In order to correlate this process of placing-in-variation that is creation itself with Tichý's photography, we must address the irreducible difference lying between the forms of verbal language and a device for the production of pictures. How can we compare the *tensors*—these deliberate flaws of the language in a situation of *minorization*, which are likely to place

Fig. 6 Miroslav Tichý,
MT Inv. no.: 10-1-13.
© Courtesy of Foundation
Tichý Ocean.

writing in variation—with the general practice of photography and more particularly with Tichý's practice?

The place given to the notion of *modulation* as identified by Deleuze in Gilbert Simondon could be of critical importance in such a transition from verbal language to picture. Sibertin-Blanc concludes his essay by reminding us that in order to make the notion of modulation less abstract, Simondon preferred the image of woodcraft to that of molding, which 'applies to an object, a thought, a technical or discursive practice (Sibertin-Blanc, 2003: 22),' with a view to understanding the stages in its formation. To this end,

> Simondon places the material that is worked on and the gesture of the craftsman guiding the gouge into the wood fibers on a single operating level (…) [It's a matter of] setting the two groups of variables, as far as their singularities are concerned, in a relation of co-variation through an intensive individuation (ibid.: 21).

The result enables to reveal a new form, stemming neither from a fixed and homogenous norm independent from the material, nor from a gesture that would

Fig. 7 Miroslav Tichý,
MT Inv. no.: 7-11-74.
© Courtesy of Foundation
Tichý Ocean.

have become automatic, but showing lively and previously unseen singularities, due to 'the very operation that determines their relation (ibid.: 22).'

In the light of this notion of modulation, Tichý's work could amount to an intense exploration of the powers of variation at work between the material that is the *human body* and the different phases of the photographic gesture. From the shots, captured with unusual devices, to their equally unusual reproduction in single prints, the attitudes and poses of the female body lend themselves to various repetitions, through a series of pictures with sharp contrasts and a sculptural rendering. Each of them, similar yet different from the others, is taken in the details of everyday life contingencies: walking, physical exercise, sunbathing in summer, or even television exhibitionism. Such pictures become intensely sober when they acquire multiple critical thresholds of visibility. The anonymity of these women—these models—is guaranteed in most cases by the impossible identification of their faces, either blurred, absent or out of frame, or when they turn their backs on the operator. Far from the portrait, Tichý imposed a restricted visibility in which the morphologies become generic bodies. This first descriptive limitation contrasts with the use of photography as memory, which enables to ensure recognition. In response to the hypothesis of a shooting methodology, he commented: 'I've walked through the town. I don't see anything, I heard nothing, I don't know what I've been photographing [sic].'[13] This automatic practice, confessing a certain degree of blindness,

confounds all expectations and denounces every possible connection with a conscious look likely to reveal a built and intentional vision, even confirming the possibility of some affinities with the Surrealist practice proposed by Quentin Bajac (Bajac, 2008: 164). The limits of the visible find another critical threshold in the enlargement of the negatives. Considering the great number of pictures, the editing process is the crucial moment when the photographer regains control over the traditional contact sheet. There is no such thing in Tichý's method. The selection does not rest on any aesthetic ground, nor does it comply with the rational logic of an intentional project: 'I didn't choose anything (…) I printed whatever vaguely resembled the world (Buxbaum, 2008a: 134).' The result is a generally imprecise construction of the pictures, an insistent fuzziness, an extreme density of the blacks or a diffuse brightness, imposing their opacity or a luminous transparency sometimes emphasized with a pencil. As an authentic interrogation in actuality on the means of his practice, these various thresholds of visibility produce pictures that sometimes verge on the abstract, such as this very dark emblematic picture of female legs concluding the catalogs of the exhibitions of Beaubourg and New York.[14] Reproduced exactly, it sums up and completes the visual journey started in each publication by the thin perception of an enigmatic movement slowly appearing in the night (fig.8).

A *Maverick* with 'Intense Intentions'

From the relatively indeterminate lighting effects, aimed at the disappearance and partial illegibility of the figures, to the possible disappearance of the work itself, one could link the intensity of the verbal language, its extreme sobriety and the expressive, stylistic and semantic limits observed in Kafka, with the exploration of the limits in the depiction of the visible world, as carried out by Tichý in his photographic practice. This possibility is certainly not irrelevant to Harald Szeemann's judgment when he decided to exhibit Tichý's work in 2004. About these pictures he crucially contributed to place within contemporary art, he said: 'Intensity always finds its medium!'[15] A constant poverty of means and a clear-sighted and obstinate program of simplifications produce a singular work which, according to him, neither presupposes any naivety nor comes under outsider art. By its insistent and systematic character, the work of this cultured artist—who gladly quoted Plato and Schopenhauer—finds its place in Szeemann's wish for

Fig. 8 Miroslav Tichý,
MT Inv. no.: 5-4-186.
© Courtesy of Foundation
Tichý Ocean.

a 'possible visualization of a museum of obsessions.'[16] In 1975, in the declaration of intent for the *Junggesellenmaschinen/Les Machines Célibataires* exhibition, Szeemann proposed to link his project of future museum with 'a history of the art of intensities that does not distinguish between the finished work and the unrealized intense intention (Szeemann, 2007: 72).' Intense, intensities, future work... The similarity between Szeemann's words and Deleuze's is no coincidence, but the result of a direct and overtly accepted parentage. The exhibition opened with Deleuze's anti-psychiatric definition of the bachelor machine and that of Surrealist writer Michel Carrouges, both drawing from Kafka's literary machine. It also drew a parallel between Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass* [Le Grand Verre] and the machines featured, reconstructed after texts from Jarry and Roussel, and after Kafka's short stories—notably the torture machine from *In the Penal Colony*.

Such correlations confirm the relevance of Tichý's original and founding position as a figure of a photographic practice in *becoming-minor*. Exhibited by Szeemann for the intensity of his work, and in the light of the literary form identified by Kafka and theorized by Deleuze and Guattari, he embodied, in a very singular way, a precarious photographic practice which he endeavored to make even more

precarious, at the threshold of disappearance, so far as to ruin part of his work—Buxbaum indeed reproaching him for deliberately destroying and burning some of his photographs. Almost unnoticed within the world of *outsider* art, and to use the words of sociologist Howard Becker, has Tichý nevertheless become an 'integrated professional (…) artist (Becker, 1982: 371)' in contemporary art over a few years? Certainly not. His success only lies in his refusal to take an active part in his own promotion and in the general indifference towards the signs of his artistic recognition: the critical texts, catalogs and exhibition posters, the weariness of the visiting curators, would rather remind us of the *mavericks* and of their relationship to the art world. Keeping their distance from the canonical norms in use, they will lose all desire to share their productions when faced with radical and uncompromising attitudes. Like musician Charles Ives, maybe 'he came to regard [a possible interpretation] as an interference (Becker, 1982: 236).'

In principle, the notion of minor photography would presuppose to identify a series of norms. Yet its various literary definitions reveal a singular mode of relationship to creation which is common to some artists regardless of their medium, and which enables to place Miroslav Tichý on the art scene as *a maverick in search of intense variations*. Besides, as shown by his sense of humor in the filmed interviews, he was perfectly conscious of his effects.

Notes

[1] Miroslav Tichý died on 12 April 2011, a few months after I wrote this text presented on 19 November 2010 (the day before his 84th birthday) within the context of the *Minor Photography: The Case of (Post)Surrealist Photography* symposium, held at the Lieven Gevaert Research Centre for Photography in Leuven.

[2] The one by Jana Hebnarova, which was declared official: http://tichyfotograf.cz/en/. That of the Tichý Ocean Foundation, proclaimed legitimate by Roman Buxbaum: http://tichyocean.com/.

[3] A project announced by Roman Buxbaum (Buxbaum, 2008a: note 18, 136).

[4] This film, released in 2007, has a website: http://www.worldstar.sleeping-tiger.com/.

[5] Brought to the author's attention by Marc Lenot, Gianfranco Sanguinetti's text for the catalog of the last exhibition before Tichý's death, held in December 2010 in Prague, has both the tone of a curator and a friendly tone (Sanguinetti, 2011).

[6] Both websites claim legitimacy over the representation of the artist, using documents as evidence. The Foundation even announced they would take legal action to defend their interests against Mrs Hebnarova's.

[7] According to Marc Lenot, Quentin Bajac, curator of the exhibition held at the Centre Pompidou, apparently had the same doubts (Lenot, 2009b: 94).

[8] As expressed by the testimonies in *Worldstar*, and by the mayor of Kyjov when he visited the exhibition at the Kunsthaus Zürich in the documentary *Tarzan Retired*.

[9] Softcore programs from Austrian television, according to Marc Lenot (Lenot, 2008: 153).

[10] Could it be Ladislav Višek? (Buxbaum, 2008a: 129).

[11] Most of it belongs to the Tichý Ocean Foundation—that is to say approximately 5000. Tichý's neighbor now owns 1000, having sold 2000 to Buxbaum in 2005 (Lenot, 2009b: 24).

[12] Quoted in (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 105).

[13] In an interview with several curators, filmed by Nataša von Kopp for *Worldstar*.

[14] Respectively on pages 122 and 302. Inventory number: 5_4-186, 10 x 13 cm.

[15] In the film *Tarzan Retired* by Roman Buxbaum (DVD, Tichý Ocean Foundation, 2004).

[16] In accordance with the mission of the working structure he founded, named Agency for Intellectual Guest Labor [*Agentur für geistige Gastarbeit*], at the service of a possible visualization of a Museum of Obsessions.

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Always in the Middle: the Photographic Work of Marcel Mariën. A Minor Approach

Mieke Bleyen

> *We must pass through dualisms because they are in language, it's not a question of getting rid of them, but we must fight against language, invent stammering, not in order to get back to a prelinguistic pseudo-reality, but to trace a vocal or written line which will make language flow between those dualisms, and which will define a minority usage of language, and inherent variations as Labov says.*
>
> (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002: 26)

Introduction

This essay is about encounters. It starts with my personal encounter with the work of Marcel Mariën (1920-1993), which simultaneously unsettled and challenged me. It was a troubling experience because it obliged me to face the limitations of

my own interpretational strategies, which were shaped by my training in art history. But for the same reason it was also a productive encounter that stimulated me to search for different approaches, one of which I found in the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Their theory of the minor as elaborated in *Kafka. Towards a Minor Literature* (1986), was especially fertile due to its connection to other concepts such as the rhizome, de/re-territorialization or becoming. They further developed these concepts in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988), which proved to offer some valuable tools to complement my previous framework of 'major' art history and allowed me to enter this work that at first glance seemed both too recalcitrant and too superficial.

I first became acquainted with Marcel Mariën as a rather peculiar figure within Belgian Surrealism, who seemed to be simultaneously all over the place in this scene and yet almost impossible to locate. Marcel Mariën's is known as the 'archivist' of Belgian Surrealism—writing *L'activité surréaliste en Belgique* [Surrealist Activity in Belgium] (1979) and editing the postwar journal *Les Lèvres nues* [The Naked Lips] (1995 [1954-1958]), which is now known for its collaboration with future Situationists like Guy-Ernest Debord and Gil J. Wolman. As such, his activity and place in history seemed foremost tied to that of others—lacking any clear identity of its own. It was difficult then to grasp this Surrealist of 'the second generation' who started to collaborate in 1937 with key figures of the Brussels Surrealist group such as René Magritte (1898-1867) and Paul Nougé (1895-1967) but continued producing collages, objects, photographs and texts until the early 1990s. Whereas Christian Dotremont (1922-1979), with Cobra, and later Marcel Broodthaers (1924-1976) with his very singular form of conceptualism, clearly took their affiliation to Surrealism in another direction, Mariën stayed on the track Magritte and Nougé had already largely outlined (Canonne 1994, 2007). Most of the time out of synch with contemporary art practices, his work deeply frustrates the idea of art history as linear progression. This strange and extended temporality is perhaps the most striking in Mariën's late photographic work of the mid 1980s and after. With its images of mainly naked women, this work rehearses an interbellum Surrealist photographic language and betrays a sense of belatedness.

Although Mariën's work strongly resisted any initial attempts to place it within art history of the 20th-Century, or to bend itself according to the logic of my interpretative grid, I could not just lay it aside. I became more and more fascinated by it, and what first repulsed me—especially the often 'tasteless' late photographs I

found difficult to look at—started to become attractive. Mariën's work clearly had an affective charge, which seemed to reside within its humorous tone and could not be easily dismissed. But in order to take this affective appeal seriously, clearly an approach was needed that would break open or escape the logic of genealogy, this thinking in terms of generations, of art history as progressive evolution. For I discovered that terms like (historical) avant-garde or neo-avant-garde were of little help to discuss the work of Mariën that, although operating in the same 'historical' timeframe, seems at odds with both (Scheunemann, 2005). Within such an art history, Mariën could only be labeled as unmistakably coming too late, an unoriginal and thus and irrelevant and belated example of Belgian Surrealism. Similarly a notion of *arrière-garde* as recently elaborated in literary study only partly contributed to a better understanding of it (Marx, 2004). If arrière-garde is understood as a 'coming too late,' and following the previous generation's avant-garde and thus working along the sidelines of, or even being passed by a new generation of avant-gardists, the term arrière-garde appears to suit the practice of Mariën rather well. The term becomes more problematic if it is understood within the context of the retrograde artist who goes in the opposite direction of the avant-garde. This kind of arrière-garde characterized by Vincent Kaufmann as a-historical/anti-intellectual/nationalist and socially conservative would not be helpful to assess the work by Mariën at all (Kaufmann, 2004).

A more affirmative way to approach this work was needed and I found it in the writings of Deleuze and Guattari. They offer some very productive concepts to think beyond these genealogies, to think beyond a 'major' art history of 'masters' and to keep our eyes open for the grassroots or rhizomes inhabiting and growing around such family trees. Their concepts allow us to conceive the diverse constellations and friendships that mark Mariën's art practice in terms of alliances rather than filiations, and in terms of a collective assemblage of enunciation, rather than individual, authorship (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 3-28). In the end they helped me to locate Mariën's work not at a distinctive point of origin or end but as moving in the middle. It does not create a place of its own, but rather operates and proliferates by parasitic contagion. As such, its relation with the past has less to do with avant-garde rupture than with picking up lines that were broken.

This essay will start to elaborate this question of a minor, parasitic history with a close reading of a detourned photonovel that explicitly tackles this problem by suggesting a rhizomatic network or collective assemblage of enunciation within

which it operates. The second section of this essay will address this movement in the middle more specifically in the context of Mariën's (late) photographic work and argue that by moving between high and low, private and public, art and porn, professional and amateur, by creatively making use of the AND…AND… AND… Mariën made his photographs stutter and stammer.

Minor Histories, Rhizomatic Readings

The work of Marcel Mariën could be introduced in many different ways. One particularly productive entrance is *Defense and Illustration of the French language* [Défense et illustration de la langue française] (fig.1). It is the backcover of the fifth issue of the journal *Les Lèvres nues* (1955) of which Mariën was the principal animator. As a thrilling example of a photonovel *détourné*, it operates at the crossroad of most of the collaborations for which Mariën is known (*Les Lèvres nues* 1995 [1954-1958]). In many ways this cover anticipated the visual interventions of the avant-garde journal *Internationale Situationniste* (1997 [1958-1969]). Yet, by its complex rhizomatic procedures it points at *Les Lèvres nues'* singularity, laying bare an assemblage of post war political commitment with prewar Brussels Surrealist activity, present in the Paul Nougé's many texts reproduced in the journal.

Starting with the backcover illustration, a first glance makes clear that this image is in fact a compilation of different images, combined with text, and arranged in a sequence following seemingly strong formal rules. Following our western reading pattern, and thus starting with the image in the top left corner, Mariën's main source for this cover is revealed as the photo-novel *Le Hasard est grand* [Chances Are Big] which was published in serial form in the journal *Intimité* (1953-1954). I'm primarily interested by the process in which Mariën turned a page from a photo-novel into the service of both a poetic (Surrealist) and political (Marxist) revolution.[1] Using the hybrid format of the photo-novel, Mariën's cutting and pasting strategies intervene both on a visual and textual level. Visually, images from the photo-novel are alternated with a variety of images from other sources, ranging from the erotic image of a naked girl bound to a pillar, to the news photographs of a cyclist or pope Pius XII. On the textual level Mariën plays with a mix of melodramatic cliché's like '*Mathilde aimait Julien*' [Mathilde loved Julien] and quotes from authors that were admired by the Surrealists, assembling on this

Fig. 1 Marcel Mariën, *Defense and Illustration of the French Language*, published back cover of *The Naked Lips* [Les Lèvres Nues], n° 5 (June 1955). © SABAM Belgium 2012.

single page figures from both a revolutionary (Marx, Lenin, Saint-Just) and literary, poetical past (Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Lautréamont). Yet the obvious heterogeneity of the source material could at a first reading/viewing almost be overlooked, concealed as it is by a strong formal coherence. The wide range of text fragments and images are almost seamlessly integrated in the rigid format of the photonovel: text balloons are white, with black letters, while captions (black with white letters) are generally arranged at the bottom of the frame. All images are the same height and printed in black and white. They are surrounded by a white space that both joins and separates them. These first signs of cohesion are reinforced by the black and white print of *Les Lèvres nues,* which erases all the physical fissures, the haptic and visible ruptures as the result of cutting and pasting of the 'original' collage. Coherence is also evoked by the recurrence of the photo-novel's main characters throughout the page. But this apparent coherence rapidly shifts into feeling of incongruence. Indeed, judging by the almost mechanical organization and the remarkably high amount of frames on the page, this is not a just a regular page from a photo novel. Neither are the frames completely uniform, as the little traces of cutting and pasting testify. Certain images seem mismatched with the overall narrative of the 'girl and the boy' and the high-society event. What does the cycler do for instance amidst these seemingly well-off people? As soon as the reader attempts to decipher the photo-novel in its habitual form—that is as a sequence operating narratively, by a specific interaction between words and images—it becomes clear that Mariën has strongly disturbed the narrative thread of his main source.

Already in the transition space, or gap between the two first frames of the page this relationship between text and image is perverted. In the first frame we see a young woman in profile in front of in a river landscape. In the caption below, she is identified as 'the prostitute Isabelle de Kelgoët, who had jumped into the Seine' and was saved by 'a young priest-laborer who falls in love with her.' In the second frame, we see a young woman sitting at the foot of a wounded man's bed. Her face is in profile and we immediately recognize her as the woman in the title frame. Yet, the caption identifies her as 'Mathilde who loved Julien.' Hence whereas captions, habitually serve as props to identify, clarify, or explain, in Mariën's collage they provoke confusion. By this simple procedure of difference and repetition, the recurrent characters of the photonovel receive multiple identities: Isabelle who is a prostitute becomes Mathilda who loved Julien to later reappear as Margueritte

who just encountered Armand in the factory. Entering in always new connections, the woman of the photonovel seems to escape her bourgeois background (the oedipal subject determined by family and conjugal relationships) of the photonovel. Very much like Kafka's 'K,' who runs in *The Trial* through all segments of society, she moves in different social circles and can no longer be fixed to one specific milieu or identity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986).

Or have we not understood Magritte's lessons at all (Foucault, 1976)? Does not Mariën's collage thwart our desire to bring words and images in connection, making any coherent reading experience impossible? What then if the caption 'Isabelle' does not tell us anything about the image of the woman seated at the end of the bed, but its mere arbitrary relationship with that image. In Mariën's *détournement* of the photonovel then, the relationships between words and images are continuously destabilized and deterritorialized by the presence of the other. Captions are no longer able to set a stable background against which the narrative can unfold. On the contrary, they create short circuits, breaking down instead of facilitating communication. Importantly, this disconnection does not occur in the separate frames itself, but in the white spaces between one frame and the other. *Within* the frames however, text balloons counteract the very dialogue they are supposed to represent, undercutting the narrative in the process.

Mariën's operations of juxtaposing words and images reveal a strong affinity with the work of Paul Nougé and René Magritte. By combining the re-writing and citing practices of the former with the complex elaborations on word and image relationships of the latter, Mariën created a misleadingly simple collage, presenting his reader/viewer with a particularly hard nut to crack (Michel, 2011; Sylvester, 1992). Bringing to mind Nougé's re-writing practices and already announcing Debord and Wols's *Mode d'emploi du détournement* [User's Guide of détournement] (1956), which would be published in the following issue of *Les Lèvres nues,* Mariën's collage aims to eliminate any possible reading of this cover-page as a work of art defined as personal expression. Rather, his choice of images, strongly embedded in the popular and mass media, combined with familiar places and quotes on the textual level operates as a collective enunciation. In that sense, this collage functions as a rhizome, shooting off in all kinds of directions and inviting the reader/viewer to make different connections rather than to (re)construct one all-encompassing meaning.

Fig. 2 Marcel Mariën,
Untitled collage [Et
pourtant elle tourne…],
1955, collection Verbeke
Foundation, Kemzeke,
VEFO-01466. © Jan
Torfs © SABAM Belgium
2012.

As such, this single collage opens different entryways to Mariëns larger produc-
tion, both textual and plastic. It shows how in Mariën's 'oeuvre,' each 'individual'
work is connected to and can be plugged into other 'machines' (that of Mariën,
which is connected those of Nougé, Magritte and many others). In its specific way
of combining text and image, it can be for instance connected to a group of col-
lages, in which Mariën has added text-balloons to found photographs (fig.2). On
a textual level the title of the detourned photo-novel: *Le Hasard est grand,* recalls
the poem-game 'Le jeu des mots et du hasard' [Play of Words and of Chance]
by Paul Nougé (1955), that was advertised humorously in the same issue and in
its turn made a witty reference to the chance-practices and the cult of 'l'hasard
objectif' [objective chance] of the Parisian Surrealists. Another staggering example
of this collage functions within a larger rhizome is the image of the cycler, which
continues to reappear in many of Mariën's objects, in the form of toy-figures.
Textually, this figure already returns in the next issue of *Les Lèvres nues* (n°6),

where Mariën stages in 'Le plaisir' [Pleasure] (1955) a fictive cycling tournament in which the Surrealist pantheon participates. The *pêle-mêle*-like synchronic joining of figures that historically would never be able to meet each other, in the earlier collage present in the form of quotations, receives a narrative layer in this text. Similar to the detourned photonovel where different voices were in constant dialogue in the form of text balloons, the narrative frame of this text makes the strangest encounters possible: in it Chaplin meets the Papin Sisters, Saint-Just, Sade and others at the pub, Ducasse visits Rimbaud's brothel and Nougé wins the cycling race from Millières and Emily Brontë. The consequence of all these figures drinking, quarrelling, whoring and cycling together is that it renders problematic every linear genealogy in the sense of ancestors and inheritors causally related to each other. Mariën's story disturbs this kind of thinking in terms of origin and imitation, influence and reception, by suggesting relationships of constant dialogue, debate, conflict and brotherhood.

Strikingly then, in Mariën's collage and text it is rather as brothers and sisters than as fathers/mothers and sons/daughters that this strange assemblage of historical and contemporary figures relate to each other. This is in itself a challenging idea, inviting us to leave Oedipal readings behind, or at least to see the sibling relationship running across and underneath the apparent Oedipal relations. Indeed, it is hard not to think the relationship between the 'second generation' of poets and artists (amongst whom Mariën, Dotremont and Broodthaers) and the first generation of Brussels Surrealists in such Oedipal terms. Mariën for instance was only 17 years old when he started to visit the house of René Magritte, then already in his early 40s. As such the history of Brussels Surrealism has often been written as a history of founding fathers and their sometimes stubborn sons, of mentors and (dis)loyal disciples, which, after WWII, would lead to stories of loyalty, rupture and patricide. Yet, as Mariën's collage suggests, other ways to describe these relationships are also conceivable. In fact, the Brussels Surrealists already developed a workable alternative by describing themselves as a group of 'accomplices (Nougé, 1954: 3).' Under the cloak of bourgeois appearances and daily occupations as lawyers or biochemists, they formed a kind of secret society that cultivated anonymity and did not eschew the clandestine. Operating in secrecy and using the 'false' as one of their basic procedures, the Brussels Surrealists felt connected with the world of 'thieves, murderers, to those political parties devoted to illegal action, who are waiting for the moment of Terror (Nougé 1956: 79).'[2] As such they had

a lot in common with the secret societies and the men of war that Deleuze and Guattari described in their plateau on becoming, as precisely bonded by alliance instead of filiation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 264-268, 317).

Moreover, within this pêle-mêle like bringing together of figures from different historical periods, it no longer makes sense to speak about the past as something to break with in order to build a future. What matters is to keep their revolutionary and poetic projects going and open it to new becomings. Deleuze with Parnet describes this logic of the rhizome as follows:

> Future and past don't have much meaning, what counts is the present-becoming: geography and not history, the middle and not the beginning or the end, grass which is in the middle and which grows from the middle, and not trees which have a top and roots (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002: 17).

If *Les Lèvres nues* was to be understood as a Surrealist journal, then, it was not so much as the youngest branch of the Surrealist family tree, but as a small post-war collective operating within a larger rhizome of Surrealism and Revolutionary practices. Within such a rhizome it makes perfect sense to publish texts written by Paul Nougé in the 1930s side by side with contemporary ones, for instanced those written by a small group of post war Parisian avant-gardists (the International Lettrists on the verge of becoming International Situationists). This may also explain why both Mariën and *Les Lèvres nues* have never defined their activities in terms of avant-garde rupture, which was something the Situationist International would be very keen to do. Indeed, Mariën seems not at all to have been interested in cutting roots or creating new points of origin. In retrospect, he would strongly criticize Debord and friends precisely for all their 'futile ruptures,' 'permanent palace revolutions,' and the kind of 'declamatory jargon that—shining in its absence of incertitude—is characteristic for thoughts without any future (Mariën, 1978:17).'[3]

It was rather in the middle that Mariën seems to have situated the future orientation of his work. Deleuze and Parnet connect this movement in the middle with a specific way of dealing with the past or beginning again, which they find back in many English or American writers and thinkers and which might be of particular relevance for the case of Mariën:

> The English and the Americans do not have the same way of beginning again as the French. French beginning again is the tabula rasa, the search for a primary certainty as a point of origin, always the point of anchor. The

other way of beginning again, on the other hand, is to take up the inter-
rupted line, to join a segment to the broken line, to make it pass between
two rocks in a narrow gorge, or over the top of the voice, where it had
stopped. It is never the beginning or the end which are interesting; the
beginning and end are points. What is interesting is the middle (Deleuze
and Parnet, 2002: 29).

Moving in the Middle:
the Late Photographic Work by Marcel Mariën

I will now to connect this idea of 'moving in the middle' more specifically with
the photographic work of Marcel Mariën, with a particular focus on his late work,
as it was published in a couple of books such as *Le sentiment photographique* [The
Photographic Sentiment] (1984), or *La femme entrouverte* [Woman Ajar] (1985).
The images in these volumes mainly consisted of photographs of naked women. In
his exploration of these mostly cropped and fragmented bodies, Mariën employs

Fig. 3 Marcel Mariën, *The Extraordinary Journey,* photograph published in *Woman Ajar* [La femme entrouverte] (Antwerp: Loempia, 1985). 73. © SABAM Belgium 2012.

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objects, most of which are very common and small in scale. Dice, toys, or cards bring an element of play to the images whereas tourist miniature replicas of the Eiffel Tower or the Arc du Triomphe transform the female body into a landscape. Accordingly, Mariën inscribes himself within the tradition of the Brussels Surrealist group, which considered the placing of ordinary, even banal objects in extraordinary contexts to be a very efficient method to suspend the procedures of habit. It is this work of *depaysement* of the object, or the *objet bouleversant* [disturbing object] that is a central feature of these images. However, in Mariën's pictures, the presence of objects is more amusing than disturbing (fig.3). The light and almost pun-like character of his photographs becomes apparent when compared with the more famous and enigmatic series of Surrealist photographs, *Subversion of Images* [Subversion des images], taken by Paul Nougé in 1929-1930 (De Nayer, 1995).[4] The procedure of the disturbing object in these photographs calls for some reflections on the effect these images have on their viewer. Mariën's images may not have the strong enigmatic power of Nougé's *Subversion of Images,* but they do seem to possess an affective quality of a completely different order: They are disturbing and provoke strong responses of another kind: often they are met with disgust, sometimes with laughter.[5] But what is it exactly, what quality do these images possess, that gives them this affective charge and makes them so offensive or witty?

I want to argue that these photographs trace a line between molar grids and molecular flows, art and pornography, the public and the private, the professional and the amateurish, which makes them particularly hard to label. By moving in the middle, they function within the logic of the 'AND' which Deleuze and Parnet described as the stuttering and stammering quality of a minor literature's, its way of escaping dualisms:

> AND, as something which has its place between the elements or between the sets. AND, AND, AND—stammering. And even if there are only two terms, there is an AND between the two, which is neither the one nor the other, nor the one which becomes the other, but which constitutes the multiplicity. This is why it is always possible to undo dualisms from the inside, by tracing the line of flight which passes between the two terms or the two sets, the narrow stream which belongs neither to the one nor to the other … (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002: 26).

A first AND in Mariën's photographs is related to that what these photographs represent: namely the female body as fragmented and alienated by small objects. Made in the 1980s, these images reconnect with an inter-bellum Surrealist iconography of cropped, fetishized female bodies, an iconography that, at that very moment, was becoming the subject of many ardent debates. By the mid 1980s two opposing readings of these images were in circulation. In a first group of texts, written in the tradition of Simone de Beauvoir and feminist theories of the 'gaze,' the re-discovery of female Surrealist artists and poets went hand in hand with a denunciation of Surrealism's male work as deeply misogynist (Gauthier, 1971; Chadwick, 1985). These kind of militant feminist writings can be connected to what Deleuze and Guattari describe as a 'molar politics,' in which women have the aim of 'winning back their own organism, their own history, their own subjectivity: "we as women…" makes its appearance as a subject of enunciation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 304).' The limits of these molar politics of representation, however, is that it often neglects and loses sight of those instances of becoming-woman/becoming-animal/becoming-vegetal, etc., that Surrealism undoubtedly also had to offer. These more 'fluid' aspects of Surrealist representations of the female body, would emerge in Rosalind Krauss's research of surrealist photography in the mid 1980s. Using Bataille's notion of the 'formless,' Krauss highlighted the experience of 'human-as-if-beast' in Man Rays *Minotaur,* the disintegration of form in Raoul Ubac's dark room experiments and more generally: the intrusion of space into the human body and the collapse of gender difference in the images of the 'phallic woman (Krauss 1985).' The disadvantage of highlighting these 'formless' operations was that it underestimated the molar grid that was nevertheless still in place. For this reason Krauss has not been able to convincingly counter the accusations made by those who read those images as misogynist and made the observation that 'the male Surrealists produced Bataille's *informe* only in regard to the female figure (Kuenzli, 1991:24).'

In this regard Mariën's photographs are interesting, since they trace a line between these molar aggregates and molecular flows. In many ways they are repeating the interwar image repertoire: Woman is fetishized in many different images, her lack often compensated by phallic substitutions, taking the form of the Tour Eiffel, a miniature pin-up doll or a chess man. She is cropped and fragmented and consequently often decapitated or dismembered. She becomes the empty surface for male inscription: the blank page on which to be 'written,' or landscape to be

conquered by the placement of objects. And finally, the origin of life and cosmic source of creation.

But they are no longer the same, they have become self-reflexive, already containing the criticisms leveled by feminism within them. A good example of this kind of self-exposure is *La pierre de Rosette* (The Rosetta Stone) (fig.4). In this image, the back of a woman is bordered with movable letters forming words. Alternating black and white, the letters are arranged into insults or pet names, abuse or worship, but in both cases, 'Woman' herself remains voiceless. Mariën here aggrandizes, blows up to such an extent that the dual logic of fetishistic celebration and sadistic violation upon which the Surrealist iconography of the female figure is founded, is exposed (Bate, 2004: 145-171). Representing Woman as a blank page, this picture is connected with a group of images produced by Mariën in the 1940s-50s. In these photographs, the female body, becomes literally the blank page or surface for—now handwritten- inscription (fig.5).[6] Yet, the text written on the back of a woman '*Blanche et muette, HABILLÉE DES PENSÉES que tu me prêtes*' [White and mute, dressed in the thoughts that you lend me] destabilizes this gendered binary logic of subject/object—active/passive. By a subtle use of shifters, which anticipates the work of Barbara Kruger, the image/body/text bounces back the male gaze, pointing at the impotence of this violent gesture of inscription, suggesting that the (femininely gendered) body/image fundamentally escapes these attempts to master or contain.[7]

If these photographs disbalance this conception of woman as blank page for male inscription, others rehearse and mock the equation of woman with landscape or nature's creative force. Indeed, the exploration of the female body by the male conquistador in Mariën's works often takes a hilarious turn. The objects that Mariën placed on the female body are by their small scale less associated with violence than play. As such it comes less as a shock then as a surprise to find a miniature hippo strolling between two breasts, a rhinoceros heading towards the vagina, or a toy horse resting upon a 'meadow' of pubic hair. Humor then, in these images operates as a deterritorializing force, making the codes of male occupation take flight.

But what is at stake in these photographs, is more than a (self-)critical reanimation of the Surrealist nude. This becomes clear if one takes into account the many open references to pornographic imagery, as for instance in *La femme entrouverte*
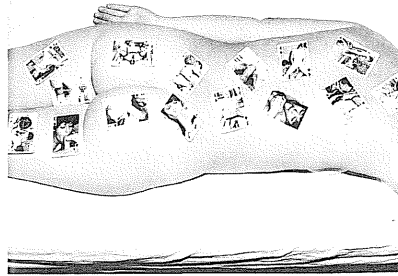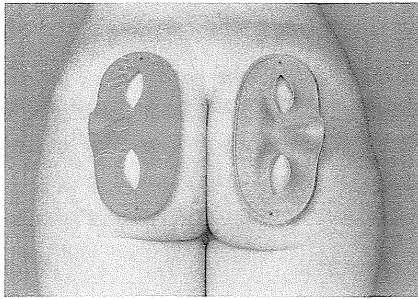
Fig. 4 Marcel Mariën, *The Rosetta Stone,* photograph published in *Woman Ajar* [La femme entrouverte] (Antwerp: Loempia, 1985): 47. © SABAM Belgium 2012.

Fig. 5 Marcel Mariën, *untitled (Blanche et muette, habillée des pensées que tu me prêtes)*, ca.1952. © private collection © SABAM Belgium 2012.

[Woman Ajar] (1985) or in Mariën's illustrations for Tom Gutt's *Le voyeur myope* [The Myopic Voyeur] (1987) (fig.6).

If the history of questioning the academic nude that started with Gustave Courbet cannot be seen in isolation from the newly invented medium of photography with its possibility to crop and fragment, neither can it be understood without one of this medium's earliest usages—pornography. The attack of the genre of the nude, was accomplished by what Kenneth Clark would call the 'naked,' as the representation of a particular naked body which was contrasted to 'the nude,' to be understood as the idealized naked body of classical art (Clark, 1985). And of course it was photography, with its indexical relationship to the real, which introduced this category of 'the naked' in visual culture, showing real, working class women in a particular place at a specific time (Solomon-Godeau, 1986: 98).

In *Art/Porn. A History of Seeing and Touching* (2009), Kelly Dennis treats the nineteenth century debate between painting and photography as an essential moment to understand art's growing need to distinguish itself from a developing mass culture. As a term historically specific to the invention of photography, pornography, occupying the basest position within this mass culture, defined art as its negative. Dennis inscribes the relative brief history of art in relationship to pornography within a larger history of seeing and touching. Central to her argument is that from antiquity on, the discussions about the hierarchy between media and genres, had firm roots within a hierarchy of the senses. Time and again, she argues, the discourses on art have privileged seeing over touching, favoring narration over description and line over color. Dennis locates the origins for this hierarchy in an age-old anxiety over a materiality of art that cannot be contained. In its tactile materiality, art carried with it the risk of not only addressing the 'viewer's' minds, but all too often also affecting his body (40-44). Yet it was only with the invention of photography in the nineteenth century 'that the seduction by the image—once testimony to the triumph of imitation—became too successful, too real (2).' Photography, inhabited thus a dangerous space of excess. It could no longer guarantee 'a discrete limit between viewer and image' and hence became the privileged medium for pornography. For pornography cannot be defined merely by its content. Rather, it seems to have everything to do with the experience of a certain (lack of) distance. Whereas art is said to incite thinking or contemplation, pornography is supposed to incite action. While art privileges the mind, pornography directly evokes a corporeal response (52-53). In short, where there is art,

there can be no pornography, and vice versa. Dennis's book, however, ultimately shows, that these boundaries are in fact more porous.

Mariën as well plays with the porosity of the boundaries between art and porn, producing photographs that bear features of both, but belong to none. It is striking to see how in these images the references to 'touching' and being touched literally pile up (in the presence of touching hands, and objects that have been placed on the body). As such Mariën seems to negotiate between the scopic and haptic, between sight—allegorically represented by the many mirrors throughout the book—and touch. Hovering between distance and proximity, Mariën finds a midway between art and pornography, which he described himself as follows:

> These works, I believe, are as far removed from what could produce professionals of photography as from the aims of professionals of pornography. I will not be appreciated by the former nor by the latter. The first are so clouded by the photographic language that they forget its object, the others do not bother about ideas at all. While it is the idea that is important and prevents the effect of monotony that mark the current erotic production (journals, cinema, etc.). It is the idea that joins body and mind and places it within a complex network of relations (Ketelbuters, 1984).[8]

Mariën thus deliberately balances his photographs between art and porn, seeking a position in the middle, which allows him to affect both body and mind. One way of achieving this is by creating an awkward tension between 'the naked' and 'the nude.' Mariën's images betray no effort to universalize or idealize his posing models, neither during production nor in the dark room, which makes them revert to the category of 'the naked:' his photographs show bodies with undisguised flaws. Importantly, the 'nude' or idealized body of the mid 1980s no longer belongs exclusively to the domain of art, but also has infiltrated the mass media, with its cover girls or top models. Since its invention photography had quickly sought to find its own procedures to transform the particular body in a seemingly more universal one. The skilled photographer had many techniques and tricks at his disposal to make the naked metamorphose into the nude. But like in painting, the omission or at least controlling (trimming) of pubic hair was an essential feature. Mariën's photographs break with these codes, showing female bodies with sometimes lush pubic hair. The 'naked' in his photographs can then no longer solely be considered a feature of the photographic medium, nor of its

Fig. 6 Marcel Mariën, *The Masked Ball* and *The Set of Dreams,* photographs published in *Woman Ajar* [La femme entrouverte] (Antwerp: Loempia, 1985): 76-77. © SABAM Belgium 2012.

flirting with pornography. It also points to a field of tension between professional and amateurish photographic practices, and connected with that, between public and private spaces.

In contrast with Nan Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1986), in which real or 'naked' bodies are a logical continuation of an intimate snapshot-photography, the photographs in *Woman Ajar* are artificial, taken in Mariën's attic, which was equipped as a small studio. As such, these photographs invite the viewer to read through the codes of the nude, while being simultaneously in discord with the represented bodies themselves, which in all their nakedness refer to a more private space into which the viewer has intruded. It is precisely as studio-photographs that their blatant amateurism becomes so prominent. These images demonstrate very little technical skill: Lighting, décor and composition all lack subtlety. Importantly, Mariën did not have a dark room and did not develop his photographs personally (Bussy, 2007: 119). In their amateurish appearance, these pictures still carry some traces of Mariën's private erotic photo albums with which they are rhizomatically connected.[9] What discerns these photographs from the ones published by Mariën in the 1980s is their domestic setting. They are not taken in a studio but in the courtyard, in the living, dining, or bedroom. They show neither cropped bodies, nor entirely naked ones. Showing complete bodies and recognizable faces, these pictures are marked by a strong complicity between photographer and the women smiling seductively on the photographs. Amateur witnesses of a private erotic life, Mariën kept most of these pictures in small albums, notebooks almost, meant for private eyes only.

In his late photographic work Mariën thus transgresses the borders that define what should remain private, and what should/ could be published and become public. Instead of respecting these borders, he produced an image continuum,

which, as he grew older, increasingly polluted the gap between the private (i.e.; archives) and public (i.e.; publications).

But perhaps a term like 'transgression,' defined as the breaking of rules or exceeding of boundaries does not completely cover the overtones. Most theories of transgressions argue that rule and transgression in practice are strongly complicit, in the sense that transgressions do not so much seek to abolish the rule as to temporarily suspend it, and that rules already inscribe their violation (Jenks, 2003). To only speak about Mariën's work in terms of transgression, seems then to be missing the point and neglect the light, often pun-like humor which disarms the violence inflicted by transgression. As we saw, Mariën seems more interested in moving between two terms, or following a side-track, than with the actual crossing of boundaries.

In 'Le chemin de la croix' [The Way of the Cross] (1954) he describes the form of transgression that in his view is proper to Surrealism as a form of sacrilege, in which 'poetry and humor become important allies' to 'de-route cliché and habitual imagery' and create lines of flight (Mariën, 1954: 21). But that is not all, for Mariën adds another aspect to what he calls the 'Surrealist poison within,' namely the often striking simplicity and efficiency of the applied tools. He describes these tools as 'vulgar' 'because they are accessible and comprehensible by all, and simultaneously also less pretentious than others (24). For Mariën, the vulgar then is both connoted by a form of communality and with a kind of baseness. It becomes both a tool for collective enunciation and an instrument to defy the elite realm of good taste and high art. It opened his artistic practice to the banal, the mediocre, the amateurish, and the small-scale of toys. It allowed him to juggle with postcards or anatomical charts. It thus made perfect sense to precisely take advantage of the vulgar aspects of photography, a medium that at the time in Belgium was still struggling to be accepted as art.[10] The appeal of photography for Mariën lays precisely in the deskilled, amateurish and private usages or in the medium's involvement in low- and mass-culture in the form of photo novels, pornographic material, or advertisements. The vulgar then is connected to a form of lowering that is simultaneously liberating.[11] Yet, as his many interventions on this kind of vulgar imagery demonstrates, Mariën seems not to be so much interested in the absolutely low. It seems not an accident that he uses the term 'vulgar' [vulgaire] in the same breath as 'mediocre' [mediocre]. It is rather in the middle, between art

AND porn that his work traces its line. But in able to find that line, he needs the lowering operation of the vulgar, which in his work is often connected to humor.

Indeed, humor operates as a device to de-route the binary confrontation of rule/taboo and transgression. It traces an altogether line, a line of flight, which is more affirmation than negation. Where transgression often operates against the public by scandalizing or repulsing it, humor only succeeds by grace of an audience. This necessarily social character of humor, described by Bergson, Freud and more recently Paulo Virno, fits perfectly with the logic of a group of in search of accomplices or allies (Higgie, 2007; Virno, 2008).[12] To find each other in humor, is like sharing a kind of secret code, a key to enter the secret society. It is also with humor, in the often jocular combinations of bodies/images and objects/text, of porn and art, private and public realms, that Mariën is able to move in the middle and make the established codes of photographic representation stammer.

Notes

[1] The first issue of *LLn* started programmatically by assembling a series of Marxist inspired texts -a text by Lenin, two by Brecht and a lecture by Mariën on Maïakovski - juxtaposed to texts with Surrealist leanings amongst which Nougé's six page long *La Solution de continuité* took the most prominent position.

[2] Original quote: 'Le monde nous offre de beaux exemples: celui de quelques voleurs, de certains assassins, celui des partis politiques voués à l'action illégale et qui attendent l'instant de la Terreur.'

[3] Original quote: 'Mais je m'en voudrais de m'engager plus avant dans la critique d'une entreprise qui puisait continuellement en elle-même la justification de ces ruptures futiles, d'une révolution de palais permanente, sans pays et sans peuple.'

[4] For an elaboration of *Subversion of Images* in the context of the minor, see Frédéric Thomas's essay further in this volume.

[5] That these images provoke such strong emotions is not only something I experienced personally during my own first encounter with them, it was also the recurring response when I showed these images to my direct colleagues, to photography curators or during the presentations I gave at conferences. Time and again people pointed out that these photographs were just plainly 'bad' and highly problematic, wanting to turn their gaze away from them. A noticeable exception were the few Mariën-lovers and collectors, often people who had personally known the artist, and in a way then could be considered his 'accomplices.'

[6] This equation of woman with 'blank page' for male inscription or landscape to be conquered is something that feminists have explored at length. See for instance: (Gubar,1991; Rose, 1993).

[7] Rachel Haidu also equates this muteness of the body with that of the image, and more specifically with the photographic image (Haidu 2010:25).

[8] Original quote: 'Ces œuvres - je pense- sont aussi éloignées de ce que peuvent produire des professionnels de la photo que des visées de professionnels de la pornographie. Je ne serai apprécié ni des uns ni des autres! Les premiers sont tellement obnubilés par le langage photographique qu'ils en oublient l'objet, les autres se moquent bien des idées. Or c'est l'idée, ici, qui importe. C'est elle qui empêche l'effet de monotonie qui marque la production érotique courante (revues, cinéma, etc.), elle qui relie le corps à l'esprit et le situe dans un réseau complexe de relations.'

[9] These private albums are conserved in the *Archives et Musée de la Littérature,* Brussels, Fonds Marcel Mariën FS 47.

[10] See in this regard the research conducted by Liesbeth Decan, *Conceptual, Surrealist, Pictorial: Photobased Art in Belgium (1960s – early 1990s),* unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, KULeuven, 2011.

[11] This 'lowering operation' by means of the 'vulgar' brings easily to mind the 'base materialism' that Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss have discovered in Bataille's dissident form of Surrealism (Bois and Krauss, 1997). I chose not to elaborate this in the context of this essay, for the reason that the 'formless' as concept is not particularly helpful to think a 'moving in the middle.' It is for instance hard to relate the jocular, humorous quality of Mariën's work with the formless. The formless implies a moving up and down, from heights to depths and vice versa, which in Deleuze's writing would be related to irony and a 'major' framework. Humor, on the other hand, according to Deleuze is to be found on the surface (Deleuze and Parnet: 50-52).

[12] For an elaboration of jokes in conceptual art, see the text by Eric de Bruyn in this volume.

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part **2**

Major Artists - Minor Practice?

4 *Fear of Reflections*: The Photoworks of Paul McCarthy

Neil Matheson

(…) *where one believed there was the law, there is in fact desire and desire alone.*

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 49)

Perhaps best known as a performance artist, Paul McCarthy is the producer of a series of often grueling, intensely corporeal, and at times highly disturbing live performances, many recorded on video, during the period 1970-84. These performances typically took the form of what McCarthy himself has called 'the flux,' a continual flow of foodstuffs and fluids—flows of ketchup, mayonnaise, minced beef and other foodstuffs—smeared on body parts, stuffed into mouths, ingested, vomited and defecated (Jones, 2000: 126). This eroticized flow is arguably, in itself, highly 'Deleuzian' in the sense intended by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who conceived the capitalist economy in terms of abstract flows of labor and of capital, where 'deterritorialized' flows of desire permeate all social relations, thus generating 'reality' itself (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 26). After abandoning performance in 1984, McCarthy's career saw a resurgence after 1991 when he

began to use animatronic figures in place of his own body in works such as *The Garden* (1991-1992), shown at the landmark *Helter Skelter* exhibition staged by MOCA, Los Angeles in 1992, and marking a shift in his practice to a series of spectacular installations with related video works, mechanical sculptures and huge inflatables. But McCarthy has also produced a substantial body of photographic work, much of which was created during the crucial period of the early 1970s when the artist was generating formative ideas and images to which he would regularly return throughout his career. I want to read that photographic work through Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a 'minor literature,' a concept based on their analysis of the writings of Franz Kafka, where the minor literature is one which functions within a major language, co-opting that language to its own ends, and where the minor is defined in terms of three characteristics: the 'deterritorialization of language,' the connecting of the individual to a 'political' community, and their conception of a 'collective assemblage of enunciation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 18).'

The Language of Art and the Politics of the Family

If we take 'deterritorialization' as our starting point and transfer this model to the context of McCarthy's work within the major language of 'contemporary art' in 1960s America, we could first say that, coming in the wake of abstract expressionism and minimalism, McCarthy experiments with marginal media (performance, video, photography), developing, along with artists like Bruce Nauman, John Baldessari and Vito Acconci, a new language of art focused on the immediacy of the body and its relationship with space—in effect, a *deterritorialization* of the language of art and the body. McCarthy's is also an *impoverished* language, one stripped down to the basics of the artist's own body—a language of *intensities*, rather than of visual elaboration, symbolism etc. McCarthy has stated that he is severely dyslexic and that he 'couldn't deal with any kind of linear language,' such that his artwork might be said to constitute an alternative, intensely corporeal language and one that we should perhaps consider as 'minor' in relation to the artist's sense of exclusion from the mainstream language (Weissman, 2005: 63). And a further analogy could be made in relation to physical migration—just as the Prague Jews moved from the rural areas to the cities, assuming a new language and cultural milieu, McCarthy was born in Salt Lake City, heartland of the Mormons,

moving from a house which he said, looked out on nothing, to the hyper-urbanism of Los Angeles, and his work remains haunted by that rural heritage: by the primal world of settlers and cowboys, with its own myths and stereotypes.

The second essential quality of minor forms is that, as the language of a minority, say Deleuze and Guattari, 'everything in them is political (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 16).' This is particularly true of McCarthy's early work and I want to argue that photography is central to that politicization. In a recent interview the artist Christopher Williams observed that: 'when I first started working with photographs [early 1970s], the choice of medium seemed to have political implications (Williams, 2010: 180).' And Williams justifies this claim by making four specific points: first, by pointing out that at the time photography 'was still not considered a primary medium for art work;' second, that 'the first generation of Conceptual artists had de-skilled photography,' giving it a democratic accessibility as a medium; third, that photography was still largely ignored by the museum; and finally, that it came to have feminist implications when taken up by artists like Barbara Kruger and Sherrie Levine (ibid.). So we can say that photography then still had an inherently 'minor' status, a subversive marginality that it subsequently lost—particularly after going mainstream with the landmark *Pictures* exhibition of 1977, and with the museum's embracing of the new color photography during the latter half of the 1970s.[1]

McCarthy's conception of the medium of photography begins to emerge in a very early work, *Looking Out, Skull Card* of 1968 (fig.1)—a crude mask formed from a sheet of card with round eyeholes, dangling from a length of string—a deceptively simple piece that elegantly explores our conception of borders, and of 'inside' and 'outside.' McCarthy likens the eyehole to 'the lens hole of the camera or the frame of the picture,' observing that '[Y]ou can't see beyond the hole,' such that the piece becomes 'a metaphor of social control, what you can see and what you can't see (McCarthy, 1996: 16-17).' This exploration of seeing and interiority is continued in *The Veil* of 1970 (pl.3), where we're presented with a self-portrait of the artist, taken in a mirror through a veil-like cloth, creating a soft-focus, spectral effect. There are a number of striking things about this image. First, the use of color in 1970 to make an artistic statement is quite unusual, given the low regard in which color photography, still considered more a commercial medium, had been held by the museum. Secondly the image suggests a concern with the phenomenology of looking, asserting that looking is always from the position of the corporeal
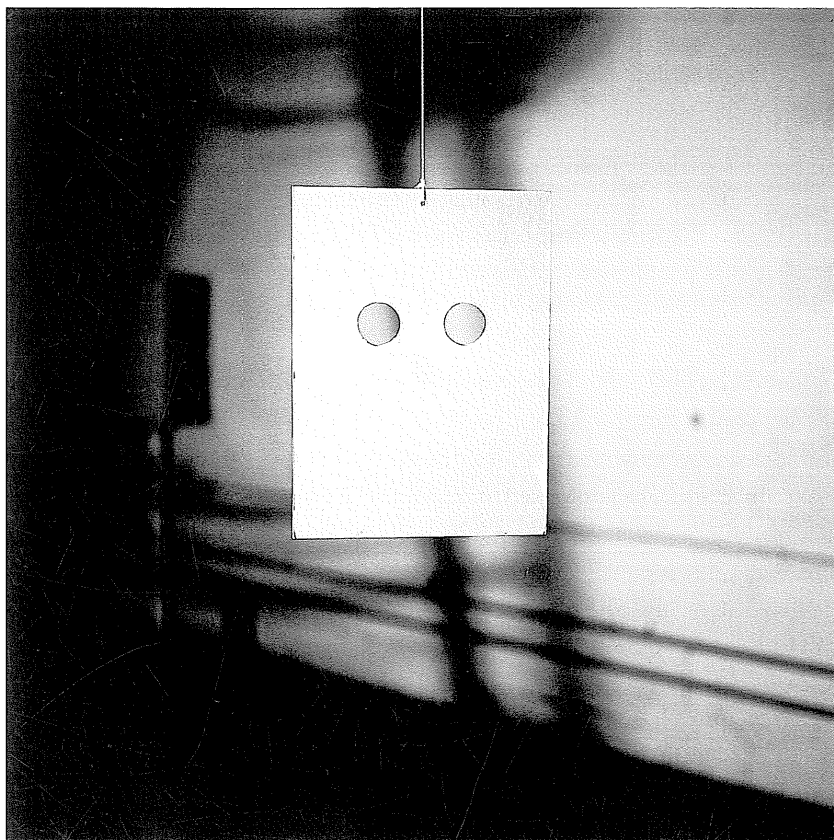
Fig. 1 Paul McCarthy,
*Looking Out, Skull
Card*, 1968. Cardboard,
string. © Paul McCarthy.
Courtesy of the artist
and Hauser & Wirth.

body. But beyond this, the image is also a somewhat satirical reflection on pho-
tography itself, where the artist's body assumes the position of the camera, recall-
ing the origins of the medium in the figure of the early photographer shrouded
beneath a dark cloth, peering into the glass screen. The image also suggests the
man-machine of Dziga Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), where the
camera on its tripod becomes animated, the lens a seeing eye, and it recalls too the
numerous images of Atget in which the reflections of photographer and camera
are frankly exposed, rejecting the medium's usual disavowal of the intervention of
the photographer in the process. Atget, working with a by then outdated technol-
ogy, returned the making of the photograph to the status of a street performance
observed by those peering from shops, doorways and windows.

Emerging as an artist into the burgeoning counterculture of the late 1960s, McCarthy was influenced by the ideas of the sociologist Erving Goffman in his seminal *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), which deployed the language of theatre to posit social roles as theatrical performances, as well as by the writings of the Scottish analyst R.D. Laing. Laing produced books such as *The Divided Self* (1959), a study of insanity, particularly of schizophrenia, and *Self and Others* (1961), concerned with inter-relationships and our sense of social reality. McCarthy refers in particular to *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise*, published in 1967 at the height of the counterculture movement, of which Laing became a kind of guru, and which analyzes problems of communication and the relation of self and other. Laing was also a prominent figure in the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s and there are certain parallels with the work of Deleuze and Guattari: both for example critique the role of psychoanalysis as a pillar of the nuclear family and hence of capital, though Deleuze and Guattari became suspicious of anti-psychiatry and Guattari attacked the movement—one reason being its denial of the reality of insanity, posing madness as a kind of repressive social construction and in effect denying the insane person's right to *be* insane (Dosse, 2010: 332). Laing's starting point is that of 'alienation,' where humanity is 'estranged from its authentic possibilities' and his analysis is notably bleak, by contrast with the *affirmative*, 'Gay Science' approach of Deleuze and Guattari, with their elevation rather than denial of insanity, and particularly the positive inflection that they give to schizophrenia (Laing, 1967: 11).

In their analysis of Kafka and of the role of Freudian critiques of the work, Deleuze and Guattari argue against such 'Oedipal' reading of his writings, citing in particular the case of Kafka's 'Letter to the Father' (1919), where the father is first accused and hated, but ultimately exonerated in recognizing that his 'distress' is equally shared by father and son alike. Instead, they argue that Kafka pushes the accusation against the father 'to the point of absurdity,' likening it to the massive enlargement of a 'photo,' a 'photo of the father, expanded beyond all bounds' and projected onto the 'geographic, historical and political *map* of the world (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 9-10).' Rather than forgive the father, then (and hence become like him), the aim is to escape him entirely by massively expanding Oedipus, 'adding to it and making a paranoid and perverse use of it (ibid.: 10).' This, in a sense, is what McCarthy does in performances such as *Family Tyranny*, performed with Mike Kelley in 1987, or *Bossy Burger* (1991), where the father

is posed as a perverse, out-of-control figure—what Slavoj Žižek has analyzed in terms of the 'anal father' or what is usually referred to as Freud's 'primal father' (Žižek, 1991: 54). This is the monstrous father of excessive enjoyment—Deleuze and Guattari refer to the Oedipal figure as 'enlarged to the point of absurdity, comedy,' which is precisely what McCarthy ridicules as the drunken Alpine Man, the bloated Santa Claus, the bloodthirsty Pirate or the Cowboy. And the body in these works is one of *intensities* rather than of 'sense,' stripped of its social meanings and regulated erotic zones; a body reduced to a series of flows, processes and uncontrolled desires—a return, in effect, to the 'polymorphous perversity' of the infant. The ideology of the nuclear family and the role of the father, in particular, becomes the target of much of McCarthy's early work, and as Deleuze and Guattari observe, the family triangle in turn 'connects to other triangles—commercial, economic, bureaucratic, juridical—that determine its values (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 17).' Such that, as with Kafka, this attack on Oedipus, on the father and the family assumes a far broader, *political* dimension. I therefore want to extend this discussion to embrace the politics of McCarthy's photographic works.

Corridors of Power: *Inverted Rooms and Hallways*

One of the central problematics analyzed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Kafka*, is that of the exercise of *power* and its conceptualization in Kafka's writings: in particular, the juridical machine of *The Trial* and the bureaucratic apparatus of *The Castle*. The pair broadly characterize Kafka's oeuvre as 'a rhizome' or as the 'burrow of an animal,' pointing to its innumerable doors, 'main doors and side doors (...) entrances and exits without doors (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 3).' They identify in Kafka a topology of power, a spatialization in terms of two interwoven models: that of the tower surrounded by 'discontinuous blocks;' and that of the hallway or corridor, laid out along an 'unlimited straight line,' with openings and doorways (ibid.: 72-75). These two models signify two different models of bureaucracy, where the tower signifies 'the old, imperial, despotic' model, while the endless hallway denotes the 'modern' bureaucracies of capitalism or state socialism (ibid.: 75). And they argue that in Kafka a shift is enacted from the first to the second model, as Kafka comes to recognize that 'the transcendental imperial law in fact refers to an immanent justice, to an immanent assemblage of justice (ibid.: 73).'

Fig. 2 Paul McCarthy, *Inverted Rooms and Hallways*, 1970. B/w photographs. © Paul McCarthy. Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

McCarthy could be claimed to be grappling with a similar problem in relation to power in a series of duplicated and rotated black and white photographs, *Inverted Rooms and Hallways* (fig.2), that he made of disused hallways and rooms in 1970. As Chrissie Iles has observed, McCarthy shows a persistent concern with 'physical and psychological dislocation' in the body's relationship with architectural space

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Fig. 3 Paul McCarthy, *Whipping a Wall with Paint*, 1974. Performance, b/w photograph. © Paul McCarthy. Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

(Iles, 2008: 6). With the inverted hallways, McCarthy combines images of hallways, either inverted or laid on their side, both to the left and to the right, where, already through such replication the building becomes increasingly labyrinthine, or in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, more of an assemblage, more 'machinic.' Iles links these images to experiments that McCarthy was making at the time using video, recording performances of himself spinning and creating a kind of perceptual confusion (Iles, 2008: 22). But apart from such perceptual problems, the photographs are specifically *political*, referring in particular to the political fallout of the Vietnam War—McCarthy himself had to evade the draft—while also reflecting the anti-establishment attitudes of the growing counterculture movement of the 1960s. The building in which McCarthy made these photographs of corridors and rooms was in fact the 'H' shaped Broadway Building in downtown LA in which his studio was located, a former government induction centre for US troops drafted to fight in both World War II and in Vietnam. As such, the building is very much a key component of what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the 'capitalist machine,' a military-industrial complex machine—not simply 'represented' or 'symbolized,' but rather something to be *experienced* from the inside (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 33). Through the use of duplication and rotation, McCarthy's images suggest something of the Kafkaesque labyrinth of

the bureaucracy, of the limitlessness and all-pervasiveness of the law. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, this is the architectural model of Kafka's endless corridors and low ceilings, where the law is *immanent* and immersive, as opposed to the *transcendental* model of law embodied in the distant castle tower.

McCarthy also saw the letter 'H' form of the building's structure as a body metaphor and produced drawings such as *Dead H Drawing* (1968), as well as a body sized-sculpture constructed from ventilation ducts, *Dead H* (1968/75). Much later, in 1999, he produced an enlarged version, *Dead H Crawl*, which he could clamber through, thus fully realizing his intention to actually experience the interiority of the structure. McCarthy also talks of art itself as a kind of 'venting'—of allowing air to flow through—and has said that 'in a way I kind of vent the subconscious (Sigler and McCarthy, 2005: 115).' The 'H' shaped structure is itself a significant institutional form, as for example in the notorious 'H' blocks of the aptly-named Maze prison in Northern Ireland, used to house paramilitary prisoners during the 'Troubles,' the political disturbances that intensified after 1969. Aerial views of the prison make clear how, as it replicates, the H-shaped unit comes to constitute a kind of carceral labyrinth. Republican prisoners who were refused 'political' status began a 'dirty protest' in 1978, in which they refused to wash or dress, smearing their cells with excreta and finally, between 1980-1981, embarked on a series of hunger strikes that, in the case of prisoners such as Bobby Sands, terminated in their deaths. Richard Hamilton's *The Citizen* (1982-1983) depicts one such bearded prisoner draped only in a blanket, with the excrement smeared on his cell wall transformed into an abstract painting. This could usefully be compared with McCarthy's earlier *Whipping a Wall with Paint* (1974) (fig.3), where the artist again uses a blanket, this time like some primal troglodyte, to lash the walls of his cave—and himself—with paint, 'to suggest,' says McCarthy, 'that an act of violence has happened (McCarthy, 1996: 8).' There are perhaps also parallels here with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming 'inhuman,' 'becoming animal,' which they associate in particular with the short stories of Kafka—becoming-insect, becoming a dog—a transformation figured in terms of bodily 'intensities (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 7-8).' This sense of the sheer *intensity* of the work is particularly strong in McCarthy's early performance works, testing and stripping the body of its ideological baggage—in effect, 'deterritorializing' the body. 'To become animal' say Deleuze and Guattari, 'is to participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape (...) to reach (...) a world of

pure intensities where all forms come undone (...) (ibid.: 13).' And the same year McCarthy produced the equally disturbing *Shit Face Painting* (1974), a videoed action in which the artist appears in photographic documentation, his face and body daubed with excrement, as though deranged or reduced to some primal level of existence. Becoming-animal, argue Deleuze and Guattari, is the 'absolute deter-ritorialization of the man,' and though no more than parallels between political acts and artworks made around the same period, these examples nonetheless demonstrate a striking congruity in their use of the body in its most vulnerable, primal state, in a kind of despairing protest against all-powerful authority as embodied in the 'H' shaped block (ibid.: 36).

Fear of Reflections: Doubles and the Distinguishing of Reality

Returning again to the photographs, McCarthy has spoken of a 'fear of reflections,' of being 'perturbed by the potential loss of the ability to discern a mirror reflection (...) from reality (Iles, 2008: 22).' During 1971 McCarthy explored this idea in a series of photographs of store windows on Hollywood Boulevard, where the images play with reflections or with the apparently lifelike quality of mannequins. Doubling, replication and the anxieties that these provoke, is also one of the key themes in Kafka, as for example at the beginning of *The Trial* when two warders arrive to arrest K; or again, in *The Castle*, where K's pair of surveyors first arrive at the village and he is unable either to recognize or to tell them apart, a problem he resolves by adopting the same name to refer to both men. Deleuze and Guattari argue that such doubles and triangles occur particularly toward the beginning of Kafka's works and function as a kind of 'blockage;' Kafka's problem then becomes that of opening up such blockages to create 'proliferating series (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 56).' In breaking out of this blockage, they argue, Kafka 'opens up a field of immanence that will function as a dismantling, an analysis, a prognostics of social forces and currents (...) (ibid.: 54).' But how might this assist our understanding of McCarthy's photographs, as for example with his *Fear of Reflections (Hollywood Boulevard)* (1971) (pl.4)? Iles suggests that McCarthy's 'fear of reflections' might be read 'in Lacanian terms, as anxiety regarding the possible breakdown of the relationship of the self (the imaginary wholeness) to the world (the fragmentary real) (Iles, 2008: 24).' Essentially, this is the trap of the Lacanian 'mirror phase,' so we might say that breaking out of that imaginary,

Fig. 4 Paul McCarthy,
Fear of Mannequins,
1971. Color photograph.
© Paul McCarthy.
Courtesy of the artist
and Hauser & Wirth.

mirrored relationship becomes the pre-requisite of achieving the kind of proliferating series advocated by Deleuze and Guattari, and of gaining a critical view of social reality—for example in breaking out of the ideology of consumption, the Hollywood machine etc. In McCarthy's doubled reflections, store interior and the external world are seamlessly merged, the real world figured as an insubstantial reflection, indistinguishable from the gaudy commercial world of shopping.

If the reflections series refers to the problem of distinguishing reality from reflection, the *Fear of Mannequins* (1971) series (fig.4) surely refers to that of distinguishing the animate from the inanimate within a culture where, as Marx first observed, the fetishized commodity assumes special powers—an issue already being explored in the work of Atget, as with the coyly seductive mannequins of images such as *Coiffeur, Palais Royal* (1926-27). This was to become a recurring motif of modernist photography, particularly with Surrealism and its eroticization of the inanimate—as for example in the famous street of mannequins of the 1938 International Exhibition of Surrealism, characterized by Alyce Mahon as 'a symbolic means of addressing the trappings of commodity fetishism (Mahon, 2005: 44).' McCarthy's version of this motif deploys brash color to highlight the artificiality of the platinum blonde wigs and perma-tanned skin, while his selection of kitsch window displays, with their gilded pseudo-classical plinths, points to a Las Vegas style culture of excess. Quite different is the black and white series *Store Arrangement (Fur Sculpture)* (1972), depicting a disturbingly animalistic, furry form, where the artist has manipulated an existing window display of artificial fur. The work characterizes the 'minor,' hovering uncertainly somewhere between the intervention, the resulting 'sculpture' itself, and the documentation of the action in photographs. There are perhaps also here suggestions of the Surrealist object and the re-enchantment of the everyday through the eruption of the unexpected.

Conceptual Art and the Language of Photography

We should also consider McCarthy's early photography as part of a rethinking of photographic language already being carried out in the conceptual work of artists like Ed Ruscha, John Baldessari and Robert Smithson. McCarthy's *Sunset Boulevard* (1970) (fig.5) is a black and white series, photographed from a car while driving the length of Sunset Boulevard, taking a shot through the windshield around every mile. There are certain parallels here with John Baldessari's early

conceptual piece *The Back of all the Trucks Passed While Driving from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara, California. Sunday 20 January 1963* (1963), and we could say that both works are 'machinic' insofar as the concept rigidly determines the form of the piece. Another clear precedent where the concept again pre-figured the work is Ed Ruscha's *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* of 1966, also shot from a car and using a motor-drive camera loaded with motion-picture film—a kind of car-camera assemblage (Wolf, 2004: 139). All of these works are highly cinematic and recall that photography, against the ideology of instantaneity and the 'decisive moment,' is in fact a time-based medium and part of the flux of time. This is particularly the case with Ruscha's piece, which was photographed at high noon to minimize shadows and heighten the effect of a film set. Ruscha has observed that: 'It's like a Western town in a way. A storefront plane of a Western town is just paper, and everything behind it is just nothing (ibid.: 140).' And we should also recall that McCarthy worked for a time as a stills photographer for the movie industry and that his conception of photography is closely bound up with the serial logic of cinema (Iles, 2008: 63).

In *Mirror Photographs -- Spiral Cone Shape* of 1971 (fig.6), McCarthy has photographed a fragment of mirror suggestive of a piece from a jigsaw puzzle, circling around that mirror while at the same time getting closer and closer to its surface, until in the final image we seem to burst through that surface and emerge 'through the looking glass.' A parallel could be made here with the work of Robert Smithson, who was also using mirrors and working with the spiral form around this time. On a trip to the Yucatan Smithson photographed square mirrors embedded in the earth to produce his photographic work *Yucatan Mirror Displacements (1-9)* of 1969, published in *Artforum* in September of 1969, so we can be fairly sure that McCarthy would have been aware of this piece (Boettger, 2004: 201). McCarthy's work therefore contributes to the rethinking of the language of photography undertaken during this period, while at the same time engaging his own specific concerns with the body—an intensely *corporeal* body—and its relationship with reality.

Desiring Machines: *Film of Desire*

I want to turn here to the third characteristic of the minor—the shift to a 'collective voice' rather than individual enunciation—and to consider the role of *desire* in McCarthy's work as the driving force of the collective. Apart from making his own
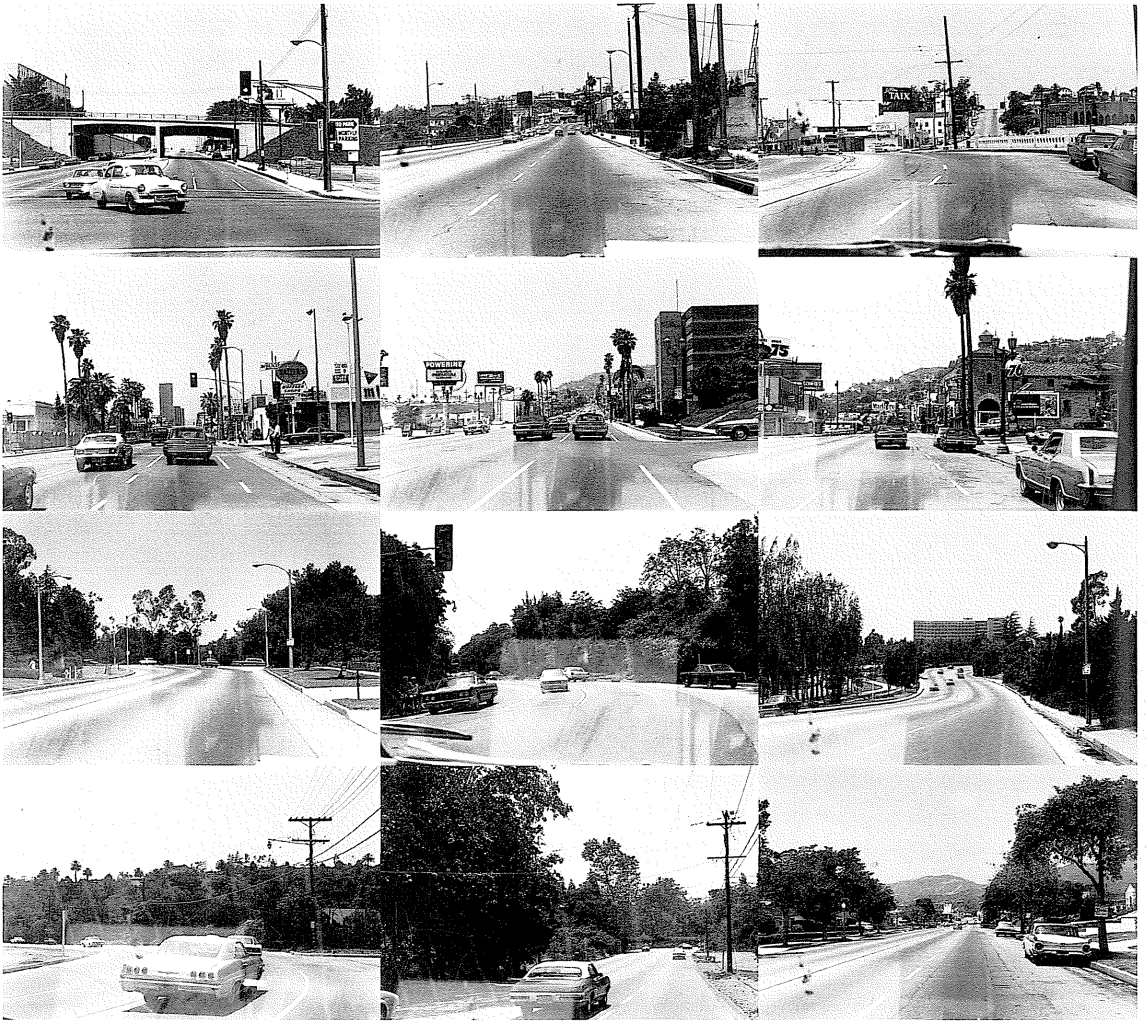
Fig. 5 Paul McCarthy,
Sunset Boulevard, 1970.
Photographic series.
© Paul McCarthy.
Courtesy of the artist
and Hauser & Wirth.

photographs, McCarthy also regularly appropriates photographic imagery drawn from the mass media—adverts, film stills and magazine imagery—as the basis of works. McCarthy moved to Los Angeles in 1970 to go to film school and much of his photographic work is clearly marked by this engagement with cinema, as well as by a reaction against the Hollywood-oriented teaching of the school. Desire is clearly identified by McCarthy as the key feature of Western culture and is conceived in a way that echoes the conception of Deleuze and Guattari: not as 'lack,' but rather as the foundation of human society and culture, the driving force
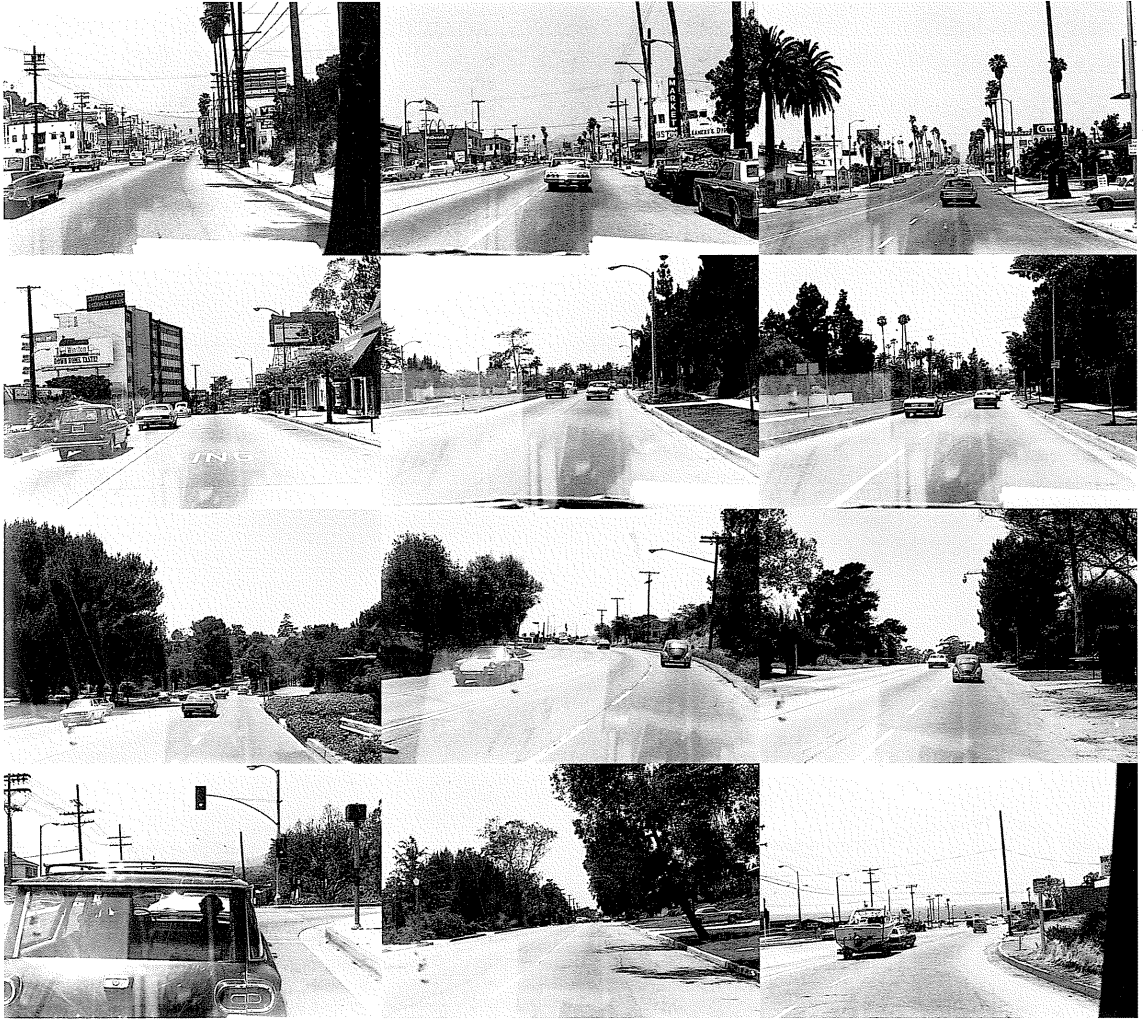
which powers the 'social assemblage' or machine—'the machine,' they insist, 'is desire (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 82).' McCarthy's *Film of Desire* (1970-71) is a work composed of the source material for a film that was never made—cigarette ads, eroticized bodies, idyllic lifestyles—and has been published in different formats, hence unconstrained by any fixed format or narrative. Many of the images contain sexual puns or barely veiled messages prescribing the accepted form of desire and suggesting a culture both immersed in and driven by the commercialization of sex. In some ways such work anticipates that of Richard Prince in works

such as *Untitled (couple)* (1977)—a commercial image of a power-dressed couple with heavy suntans and eerily glossy skin—and heralds the strategy of 'appropriation' associated with postmodernism. Prince's strategy differs from that of McCarthy in that he re-photographs and enlarges his source material, and also isolates the image from its surrounding text. Michael Newman, in an analysis of Prince's *Untitled (couple)* in relation to postmodernism and appropriation, observes that the mental process at work here is not so much that of the 'expressive' subject 'whose inner life is expressed or externalized in gestures or in works of art,' but rather takes place 'with respect either to a somewhat paradoxical outside without interiority, or to an "inside" constituted purely of identification with "external" images (Newman, 2006: 58).' And with McCarthy too we could say that the work is not about individual psychology or personal 'expression,' but rather an intervention in this endless flux of external imagery, whether as encountered out in the world, or as already internalized through constant repetition in advertising, cinema or the media.

With *Winston Box* (1976) and *Winston Longs* (1976), McCarthy again appropriates cigarette advertisements, using them either straight, or manipulated as collage. The Duchampian gesture of adding a beard to a female model serves to underline the gender politics of such imagery, though the added male genitalia is more in line with the humor and scatological obsessions of McCarthy's performances, with their genital play, mock castrations etc.—but also with the fluidity of gender identity in the performances, as McCarthy plays with wigs and clothes, or switches sex. Again, Prince, in works such as *Untitled (cowboy)*, (1980-84) came to focus on the gender implications of such adverts for masculinity with his series of Marlboro ads, with his own imagery seamlessly merging with the seductive flow of glossy advertising imagery, whereas McCarthy's work by contrast satirizes or ridicules that world, exposing the erotic sub-texts in a rather more visceral and confrontational way. Such works evidence McCarthy's concern with the key role of eroticism and the commercialization of sex in western commodity capitalism—this current of desire that underpins everything, or what Deleuze and Guattari pose as the 'machinic assemblage of desire (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 82).'

McCarthy's performance work *Sailor's Meat* (1975) provides an instance of where a specific photographic image—a black and white film still from the 1963 Russ Meyer film *Europe in the Raw*—functioned as the key source for the work. Deleuze and Guattari claim that certain photos in Kafka's works have a power to
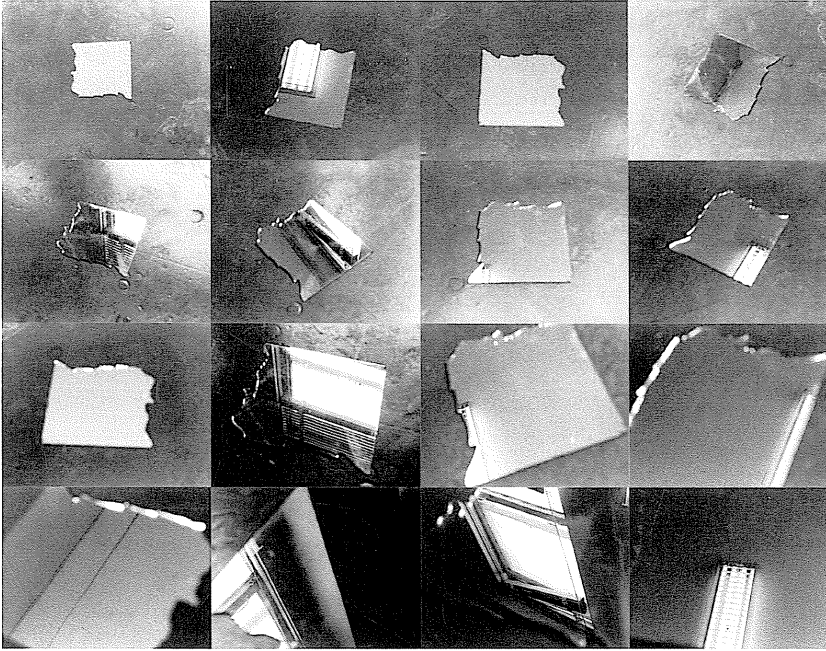
Fig. 6 Paul McCarthy, *Mirror Photographs – Spiral Cone Shape*, 1971. Photographic series. © Paul McCarthy. Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

transform or metamorphose those who gaze on them, and if we look to the very beginning of Kafka's story *The Metamorphosis* (1915), Gregor's sudden transformation into a gigantic insect is directly linked to his lovingly cutting out and framing a picture from a magazine—an image of a woman swathed in furs, whose arms disappear into a huge fur muff. In *Sailor's Meat* McCarthy too undergoes a dramatic transformation as he assumes the eroticized pose of the actress in the film still, performing the work in a disused hotel in Pasadena that he was then using as a studio, and he both videoed and photographed the performance. In that piece, McCarthy, wearing a blonde wig and women's underwear acts out the role of the woman in the photograph; he cavorts on a bed, smears his body with ketchup and fornicates with a mass of meat and mayonnaise, finally smashing the food jars and walking barefoot on the broken glass. Desire is enacted here in all its perversity, where, as a woman, McCarthy identifies with female pleasure, while, as a man, fornicates with the woman-as-meat. Russ Meyer had already hijacked that stereotypical male fantasy of the sexually driven woman, exploiting and exaggerating it in cult films like *Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (1965) and *Vixen* (1968), such that the image is arguably *already satire*. McCarthy again reterritorializes

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that image, recoding it, both in terms of personal sexual obsession, but also as a parody of a culture of sheer excess, of consumption and solitary pleasure. In a unique photowork, *Sailor's Meat, Europe Raw* (1975), the film still, McCarthy's performance and the props are all rotated, disorienting the viewer and transforming their meanings, such that the woman becomes the figure-head of a ship, as well as an erect male organ, while food jars double as female genitals, echoing their role in the performance.

When reconsidered through the optic of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the 'minor,' McCarthy's photographic work comes to assume a new significance, coming as it does at a pivotal stage in the development of his oeuvre, as well as at a time of radical change within the culture—both in relation to the emergence of a counterculture and the shift to the conceptual in art, while also paving the way for the emergence of the postmodern. Conceived more as assemblages than as discrete works—components of the 'social assemblage of desire'—McCarthy's photoworks have been seen to both directly engage with the cultural and political shifts of their time, while contributing to the formation of a new photographic language.

Notes

[1] The *Pictures* exhibition, featuring artists such as Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, Troy Brauntuch and Jack Goldstein, was staged at the Artist's Space in New York in the autumn of 1977. The breakthrough for color photography came with the exhibition *William Eggleston's Guide* staged by John Szarkowski at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1976.

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5 Considering the Minor in the Literary and Photographic Works of Rodney Graham and Tacita Dean

Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes

This essay explores how some visual artists, who work in many media, may pursue what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have termed the minor in or through photography, as well as through writing literature. I am focusing on the practices of Tacita Dean (b.1965) and Rodney Graham (b.1949), whose photographic work is diverse and who have both turned their attention to the unspectacular and slightly nerdy pursuit of writing and creating literary texts, of producing specimens of a dying commodity: the book. Deleuze and Guattari's three characteristics of the minor are 'deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 18).' In the essay, I wish only to align their practice to these writings broadly, as the authors understood the concepts as necessarily shifting. They wished them to be applied actively and not 'fulfilled' to the letter. It is thus the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari—accounting for cross-disciplinarity and time difference—with which the examples here are confronted.

As an English artist living in Berlin and a Canadian one from Vancouver, Tacita Dean and Rodney Graham have both reached a certain canonical, i.e. 'major',

status in the otherwise not so dominant realm of contemporary art. I will probe the minor in their photography and then turn to literature—their literature—as what I propose to be a somewhat more potent locus of the minor in Dean's and Graham's practices. This will not necessarily (just) be considered to constitute minor literature in the sense that Kafka is for Deleuze and Guattari. What I hope will emerge is a sense of the currency of literary writing as a minor practice in relation to visual art.

In conclusion, I will give a short institutional perspective by noting a fashion for Deleuze and Guattari's concepts in mega-exhibitions of contemporary art at the turn of the millennium and by suggesting that the interest in literary forms is currently gaining momentum—a community—among visual artists and may thus be turning into a potentially more major, dominant, reterritorialized practice: in the nascent field of art writing and the PhD with art practice.

Photography

I view Deleuze and Guattari's three characteristics of minor literature in relation to the work of Dean and Graham through the experience of having encountered these two artists as members of a relatively small but distinctive group of international, English-speaking artists, who have built strong personal friendships through their shared (deterritorialized) experience of spending a year abroad in Berlin under the aegis of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), formerly led by Friedrich Meschede. The 'connection of the individual to a political immediacy' could not be clearer or more immediate in that city. Some, like Dean, remained in Berlin permanently and the collective enunciation is manifest in such gestures such as the fact that Tacita Dean contributed a letter to the recent retrospective of Rodney Graham's work (Barcelona, Basel, Hamburg), curated by Friedrich Meschede (Graham, 2010).

Dean found photographs in Berlin's flea markets and created from these her *Floh* book (Dean, 2001). It embraces the inadequacies of the untrained photographer, developing only a tentative, stammering narrative in the iconographic or typological arrangement, which the artist gave to them. *Floh* could be said to display a stuttering and making-strange of the lens-based image by a highly accomplished film-maker, thus showing in the realm of photography that her interests veer

towards the minor. *Palast* (2004) (Dean, 2005b) is a series of photographs, this time taken by Dean herself, which features a mirrored image of Berlin Cathedral in the windows of the then soon-to-be-demolished *Palast der Republik*. The attempt through demolition to erase one part of history and privilege another fails to account e.g. for the fact that one could already see history—and not necessarily an entirely peaceful one in Prussia—in the disheveled façades of the GDR's flagship building. It had already become 'reflective' almost 'see through' and would only be remembered as more perfect than Dean documents it to have been.

Rodney Graham has in his practice turned more and more towards photography in the footsteps of his long-standing friend and fellow West-coast Canadian, Jeff Wall. Large light boxes have entered with international artistic success, alongside an increased interest in role-playing or self-portraiture in the broadest sense, and are now neither in Graham's practice (nor in contemporary art) a minor pursuit—although the content is always somewhat jarring with the form, owing to its historical or archaic subject matter.

While Graham re-creates and stages history, in the case of Dean, the photographic (as the film) camera is directed at what is about to disappear. Deleuze and Guattari spend a page or so in the context of minor literature speaking about classicisms, revivals and archaisms, and remark that revolutionary movements 'are also filled with archaisms (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 24).' The political immediacy noted exists, but together with the internationally prominently exhibited, medially diverse oeuvres of Dean and Graham, a 'blur [as they call it, ensues], a mixed-up history, a political situation (ibid.: 24).' These photographic works' minor status is thus far from certain. Staged histories in Graham's case are excessively elaborate, witty and humorous, effectively outdoing advertising aesthetics with its 'major' light boxes. Whether he thus displays overdetermination in prolific reterritorialization (an approach that Deleuze and Guattari associate with James Joyce) is possible but also doubtful.

Dean overpaints photographs: a deliberately archaic move that has more to do with the coloring and retouching of early photography than with photoshop. One can possibly liken the outcome with Kafka's deliberately impoverished use of the archaic and even 'incorrect' German, as spoken in Prague. Dean isolates trees or a dolmen or a stone in expanses of white 'abstraction,' returning the image to its

generic form, to the isolation in which it is found in children's drawings—or in early studio photography.

Perhaps the clearest minor element concerning Dean's and Graham's 'blurring' archaisms is that they operate with analogue technology in a very deliberate, contemporary way. Dean tenaciously uses analogue technology, the archaic practice that is deterritorialized in its banishment from photo studios and cinemas, in order to bring it into the gallery, where in form and content it will (I think rightly) be seen as a political statement (Dean, 2006). There, it also has the chance of finding like-minded contemporaries for it to achieve a 'collective assemblage of enunciation.' It is interesting that the 'unsophisticated,' old medium is not—as one may expect concerning other media—to be linked with impoverishment. On the contrary: overdetermination (necessary in the production process as well as comparatively in the result) and proliferating detail and color are the result of the old, not the new medium. In Deleuze's and Guattari's framework (in the literary field), this would constitute a coincidence of Beckett's and Joyce's—a complex minor practice—and one that will need to change the concept of the minor in the process.

Linguists would call the coincidence of older forms of language with what has already developed further in the economic and cultural centre the colonial lag (although Deleuze and Guattari don't credit them for this: 1986: 24): in the fringes of the community of speakers, language is more archaic, perceived to be less accomplished, fashionable or received in its choice of vocabulary and pronunciation. Although it is now (in comparison with Kafka's time) less clear where the margins of a community of speakers are, the colonial lag may be applicable to the use of a medium, such as digital or analogue photography—pointing not so much to a geographical situation, but to an (at least partially) deliberate alignment, a choice of the marginal, minor practice on the part of an artist, who questions the dictate of consumption, fashion, progress and originality.

Rodney Graham returned to the origins of photography in his *Roman Ruins*, 1978, taken with a self-made, archaic camera, in order to respond to the city representative of 'old civilization.' His recent photographic work, involving large light boxes, is clearly much more sophisticated both technically and conceptually, and also involves the recreation of a complex 1960s setting, such as in *The Gifted Amateur, Nov. 10ᵗʰ, 1962* (2007). In film, a similarly faux-archaic work is

Performance Lobbing Potatoes at a Gong, 1969 (2006). In the former work, re-printing newspaper, in order for it to be strewn around the floor of the setting, involves some 'old' technology. Indeed, Graham used the newspaper as the image for the catalogue cover of his recent retrospective (Meschede, 2010). The film *Lobbing Potatoes* was formally characterized by the use of one hand-held camera, thus completing the retro picture to arrive at a full-scale historical 'reconstruction' of something that had not happened like this in the 1960s.

Julian Heynen has called Graham's filmic and photographic work in particular 'staged astonishment (…) almost childish amazement [at the variety of image-making practices] which nevertheless poses its questions very seriously (Meschede, 2010: 16, 18).' He finds opportunities for transformative appropriations in these re-presenations, but also in Jeff Wall's work and that of others. Heynen had already noted, however, that 1980s appropriation does not describe the state of affairs in Graham's practice well. Simon O'Sullivan goes further than this: he captures the repetition of the old that is characteristic of contemporary art as repetition of the modern, rather than merely or mainly as deconstruction; it is something between Bourriaud's postproduction and Deleuze's renewed throw of the dice. Indeed, repetition with a difference would also evoke Joyce's use of Giambattista Vico, where a thunderstorm—a stutter in *Finnegans Wake!*—constitutes the glitch. Of course Friedrich Nietzsche's notion of repetition with a difference is relevant here also.

O'Sullivan's observation that time is crucial in such works, both in their stillness and accelerated time, is also valid (O'Sullivan, 2006: 5). Analogue (16mm) film, as used prolifically and deliberately by both Dean and Graham, reminds the viewer of when images first began to move—and implies the slow, painstaking work at the cutting table. Graham's practice involves some inserts, such as pages to 'supplement' a Freud edition, or other additional pages in a James Bond narrative and a Dr. Zeus book, thus breaking the flow, entering a glitch, taking flight. But this would already relate more to literature than photography.

The collection of flea-market photographs (Dean) and the staged photograph in a large-scale light-box (Graham) would point to attempts on the part of both artists to avoid the vast middle ground of photographic production of both semi-competent private photography and advertising: to go above and below, out-maneuver the major practices, especially through archaisms. However, within the contemporary art economy, as the works in question remain in the major, well-accepted

(and sellable) forms of artistic production by highly esteemed contemporary artists. It appears to me to be very difficult, indeed, to affix labels, to grasp, retain or regain the shifting minor impetus in art photography today—to do more than to note an interest in deterritorializing elements in and of photography, the political and the communal, to point out a tendency—even where the politics of the artists, as implied in their works, and their ambitions can be established to subvert the major and perform maneuvers that generate a glitch.

Literature

The topic of minor literature and if and how it can be transposed to visual art forms is one that goes to the heart of word and image relations and means that the 'sister arts' need to be reconsidered in a number of ways. One question would be: if we use this concept in and apply it to visual art, is it still—as it certainly would have been in the past—a problem that literary theory leads the conversation and literature is proposed as a model? Word and image relations are, of course, constantly re-negotiated and artists will take what suits. If the book suits certain artists, the hypothesis may be worth advancing that there is something about the book that is (or is about to turn) minor.

Where photography was such a desirable medium for Walter Benjamin (Benjamin, 1968), due to its cheap reproducibility, the book shares with the photograph precisely this central characteristic for pursuing politically and socially engaged, liberating ends. In conversation with Martha Rosler, I had observed that she was reading James Joyce differently to the literary scholars of her time (in the 1960s and 1970s), who found him too apolitical. She commented that in reading Joyce, she felt personally touched: he seemed to address her Jewish background, as well as the necessity of freeing oneself from all orthodoxies. Moreover, he echoed her politics, which he didn't describe or preach, but conveyed with clarity nevertheless (Lerm Hayes, 2004: 145). From the vantage point of a visual artist in a context where originality and aura were nearly universally valued, the book already had the advantage of being cheap and reproducible, thus reaching a broad audience and conveying engagement. Joyce developed a new language with which Rosler could identify. She had sensed what Deleuze and Guattari would consider the political immediacy of minor literature,[1] but not just in the content, but finding it enhanced by the 'book-ness' of literature.

A PENDANT TO POE'S LAST STORY

THE SYSTEM

OF LANDOR'S COTTAGE

BY

R. GRAHAM

———

YVES GEVAERT &
THE ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO
—
1987
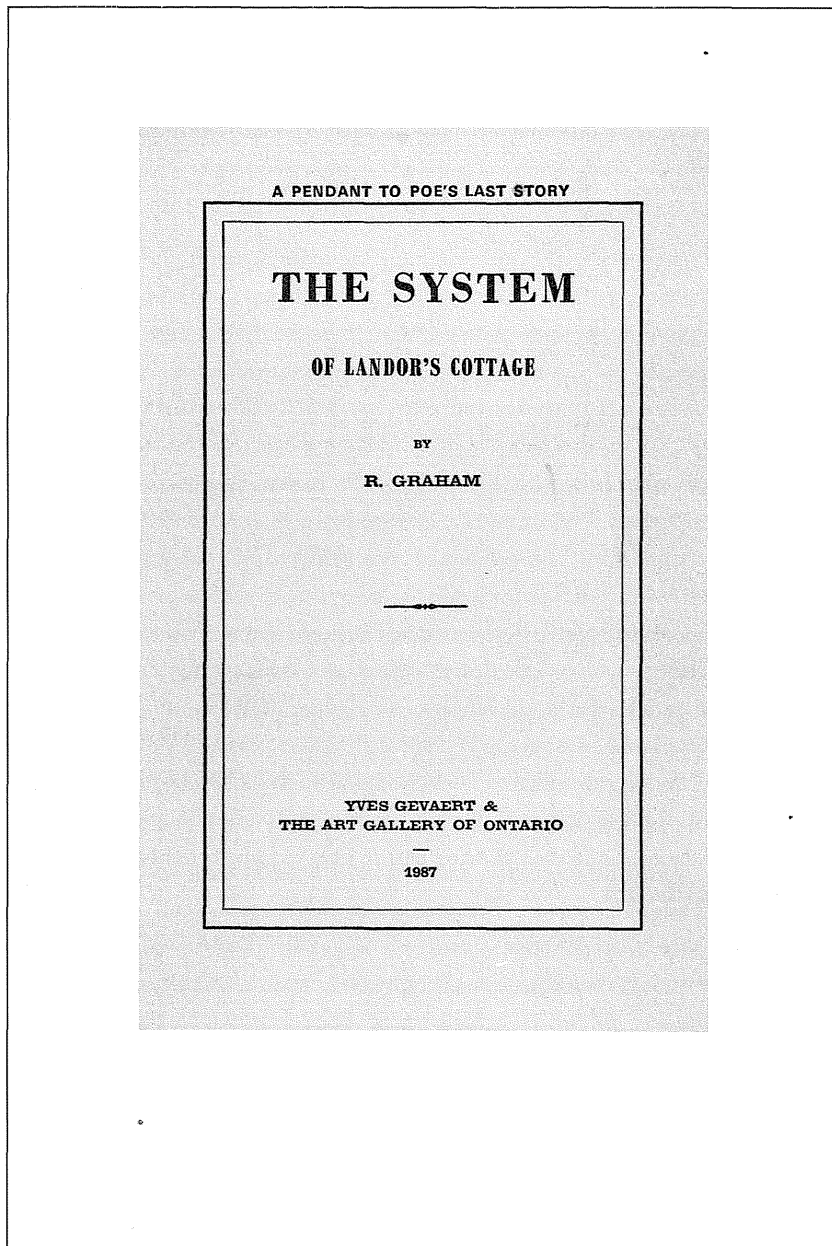
Fig. 1 Rodney Graham,
*The System of Landor's
Cottage: A Pendant to
Poe's Last Story*, 1987.
© Tate, London 2012.

This already liberating aspect of literature is today, it seems to me, joined by the demise of the book as an object: briefly revived by internet sites such as Amazon, where one can buy books from home with ease, it is—especially as a carrier of fiction—now virtually obsolete, due to the even quicker and cheaper option of downloading literature onto one's Kindle or other devices. The book object itself is becoming minor. With this for many somewhat depressing tendency in mind, I turn to Rodney Graham's and Tacita Dean's writings.

In his recent retrospective, Rodney Graham exhibited a small model of a house that never existed. It is *Landor's Cottage*, from the fragment of the same title by Edgar Allan Poe. Graham researched a literary museum, Poe's house in New England, but the model for the work is the literary piece, which now exists in three dimensions for the first time. The narrator describes a walk in a forest, where he accidentally encounters this building, its gardens and eventually its inhabitants: all described in the most eulogistic terms. The reader increasingly wonders when this idyll will be broken and when the menacing turn will come, where the 'tell-tale heart' will be found. But expectations are not fulfilled. The piece is a fragment, the last of Poe's writings before his death. To postpone the chilling moment of the author's death (and possibly to wish himself into the dense Canadian forests of his youth), Rodney Graham decided to expand the short fragment into a novel-length text and also to design the cover for (and every aspect of) this publication: *The System of Landor's Cottage: A Pendant to Poe's last Story* (1984-1987) (fig 1). Graham here invents one annex to the building after the other, each more refined than the previous one: pictures of perfection, but only in our minds' eyes, as the model cannot show them, thus proving wrong either Graham the author or Graham the model-builder.

The baroque prose would seem to militate against the sobriety of the minor (although the minor is not a stylistic category and Deleuze and Guattari included James Joyce among the writers who were producing minor literature: Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 19). Where Poe had institutionalized the glitch in his stories, Graham finds it uncharacteristically absent in the fragment and overdoes the eulogy, thereby himself subverting expectations, moving the minor glitch to new territory: the intense proliferation of the text as a writing machine.[2] *The System of Landor's Cottage* in its long version, albeit still fragmented and thus never-ending, has something decidedly Kafkaesque about it, leaving the reader (and also clearly the second writer) trapped in what can be captured as a menacing furniture mall

or TV shopping channel made up of eulogistically described interior scenes, ready for mass consumption. The communal aspect of the minor is certainly given: Graham complements and extends Poe - as if to emulate Joyce's strange gesture to task James Stephens with the completion of *Finnegans Wake*, an utterly incompletable and also already polyvocal text, in case Joyce were to die. Graham's Poe works also, of course, deterritorialize the writer, rendering him both strange and fruitful in the field of visual art and in the 21st century.

Tacita Dean's 2003 text entitled *W.G. Sebald* (fig. 2) is one of seven thin volumes in a sparse, white slipcase that was published for Dean's Paris exhibition in that year. The volumes' range is diverse: from a more conventional catalogue to a filmography, critical essays on Dean's practice—and her own authored text bearing the name of the writer who had died two years previously. Dean creates a dense web of references between Sebald, her reading of his *Rings of Saturn* (1998 [1995]) Roger Casement, who featured in that book, the Titanic, the Marconi Corporation, Ireland, World War II, and her own as well as her family's history, which reaches into and revisits these historical spaces. In the present context, Dean's text can be understood as a writing machine: more clearly than Graham's work its overdetermined prose deterritorializes and in the most diverse ways reterritorializes the artist's position. This is what it may also perform for the viewers and readers: an establishing of connections across the media and into their own realm. A community is potentially created through this work as trigger for constellations. Umberto Eco's *Open Work* (1989) may be the best way to capture this potentiality for polyvocality that includes the recipient (James Joyce was Eco's prominent example).

Dean refers to what André Breton called objective chance (Lerm Hayes, 2008/2011). The constellations are sometimes more than unpleasant coincidences, like the revelation that Dean's ancestor was the judge who condemned Casement to death. Meanings are not predetermined by the literary model; continuities as well as ruptures exist. When linking Dean's treatment of Sebald to Kafka's relationship with his models (or what Deleuze and Guattari take that to be), it becomes evident that what is in the foreground is the 'mode of writing that allows us to account for the different "machines" that condition our actual relation to the world (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: xvi).'

Occupying the literary space can only partially be a parasitic action, when the institutional powers of the publishing industry are, of course, exercised also over

the realm of art book printing and distribution: the worlds are part of the major—and in turn one reason for the many zines, artists' books and journals being published in alternative, minor forms. One can speak of cross-fertilization of the various genres of texts and forms of distribution: Dean's *W.G. Sebald* text was first published in a place where autobiographical fiction is not usually to be found: the journal *October*. Despite partaking in the field 'literature,' I don't think anyone would expect Dean's *W.G. Sebald* text to have revolutionized literary writing. It appropriates from Sebald his semi-fictional, historically motivated, associative prose and his use of photographs. Although Sebald used black and white images and Dean illustrates also in color, they are similarly highlighting the failures of representation. Dean's concluding illustration e.g. shows the bleached-out document of a prize that Sebald received shortly before his death and with which he is pictured here. The literary work reveals its power in relation to Dean's visual work—not in interpreting it, but in sharing of the same impetus, writing with her practice of which it is a part, simultaneously subverting that belonging. the text also acts as a glitch in *October*.

Dean's and Graham's artists' writings are clearly and intentionally literary in nature, borrowing from or collaborating with Poe and Sebald respectively. They don't have much chance (nor do they seek) to share in the economy of the literary profession. They are truly 'bilingual' texts with a future orientation towards their point of origin: visual art—just like Beckett's visual practice sought to reinvigorate the minor, to find a glitch in and of his written work through transgression of the genre boundaries (Lerm Hayes, 2003). As literature, they are entirely competent, but may not have their primary purpose in being professionally crafted to the last: as trans-disciplinary texts they are results of their authors' 'dabbling:' a move towards the minor's intended impoverishment—without needing to trouble the 'doubly gifted' artist category.

As literary texts, *W.G. Sebald* and *The System of Landor's Cottage* can provide a possibility for a literary audience to gain access to contemporary visual art, but such didacticism cannot be the main objective. In Dean's case, reciprocal complementarity is a likely motivation: Sebald's use of photographic images is a subject on which much has been written (Patt, 2007). Her feelings of affinity to Sebald brought her to film his friend, the poet Michael Hamburger. Answering the recently deceased writer in his own medium is an homage that reveals common concerns—and expresses a sense of community, as well as building such

W. G. SEBALD

TACITA DEAN

Fig.2 Tacita Dean, *W.G. Sebald*, 2003, featuring *Tacita Dean in the bus stop, Naselesele, Fiji. 2003.* Photo: Mathew Hale. © Courtesy of the artist, Frith Street Gallery.

community: Sebald's historical interests, Dean's own family history and German themes intertwine to form an approximation of Sebaldian (and possibly Joycean) overdetermination: openings for the many but vague, unpredetermined, fleeting reterritorializations of the readers.

Friedrich Meschede's concept for his Rodney Graham exhibition was to foreground books, to draw attention to the fact that the collaboration with the publisher Yves Gevaert had begun as early as 1987 and is continuing. It had largely gone unnoticed in terms of the work for which Graham was becoming renowned, or was considered as 'other' in relation to it. In the catalogue to the exhibition (Lerm Hayes, 2011), it was possible to conclude that there is a correspondence between the ways in which Graham approaches film and comments on the modes of production of lens-based media, and how he treats the 'literary' realm: the book as an object, as well as texts and their modes of production and dissemination. Writing and the book are thus treated similarly and used for related ends. The difference is just that it has been a neglected part of the oeuvre: always present, but nearly invisible, important in developing and substantiating the practice, but unruly: minor.

One could possibly go as far as to say that writing has sustained both Graham and Dean from the beginning of their careers; some of Dean's short pieces are brought together in her collections of her writings (Dean, 2011), but catalogue essays, obituaries, newspaper articles and other ephemera will continue to disappear. The artists are returning with added intensity to writing as an at once familiar and strange practice. They do this at a point in their careers, where they appear to enjoy eschewing the spectacle, showing engagement and foregrounding community.[3] The artists wish 'to become a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to [their] own language (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 19).' Tacita Dean gives expression to that in Rodney Graham's work in a letter she contributed to the mentioned Rodney Graham exhibition catalogue (Meschede, 2010: 57). She focuses on his capacity for relinquishing control of his work's production, becoming an outsider to it and focusing instead on the 'acting' component, while also assuming that role in a less than 'artful' way.[4]

Dean and Graham, particularly in their writing, are finding an approximation of their 'own point of underdevelopment, [their] own patois, [their] own third world, [their] own desert (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 18).' When remembering

Clement Greenberg's dictum that visual artists should avoid literature like the plague and the white cube's purely visual remit until not so long ago (in certain places), literature as produced by visual artists can indeed be called one of contemporary visual art's most productive 'deserts;' and Dean and Graham visual art's 'traitor prophets.' How long that will remain this way and eschew reterritorialization is another question.

Institutions

Rodney Graham chose for his 1992 documenta contribution the Brothers Grimm Museum in Kassel as his work's context and venue. The artist's move towards the slightly stuffy institution of the cultural canon in the face of the biennale/documenta circuit is tellingly minor. The choice points towards new institutionalism, which has a strong and quite particular relationship with Deleuze and Guattari. In 2002, several major and well-funded art events referred somewhat confusingly to the authors' concepts, especially plateaus and rhizomes: Okwui Enwezor's Documenta11 with its preparatory, roaming platforms, Manifesta 4 in Frankfurt, as well as the Venice Biennale, curated by Harald Szeemann under the title *Plateau of Humankind*. Manifesta with its changing venue already has an inbuilt inclination to operate like rhizomes. In 2002, it wished to 'establish a more rhizomic structure which can relate one project to another' (Manifesta 4, 2002). From that point of view, all art exhibitions operate like rhizomes in that they bring together artworks temporarily and disperse them again afterwards: they are plateaus.

All of this clearly constitutes a problematic reterritorialization. One can also, however, I feel, observe in these events a wish to engage with social and political realities and to use as well as critique the institutional frameworks and gain momentum for minor concerns. This may in so far be justified as contemporary art itself is a minor form of 'cultural' expression vis-à-vis the entertainment industry, but it may become a trope nevertheless and not be efficacious. The current relentless focus on the (economic) 'impact' of culture, however, may today render minor any attempt not to cater for these expectations (Rancière, 2009). Among the 2001/2002 mega art events mentioned, the case of the Venice Biennale is particularly complex in its relationship to Deleuze and Guattari: Harald Szeemann's Biennale attracted nearly ¼ million visitors, but the curator's move in the late 1960s to be an 'intellectual guest worker' (and remain one for most of his

career) clearly conjured the 'desert' and its potential. Szeeman wished to be and to remain minor. Calling his cumulative project the 'museum of obsessions' points to Deleuze and Guattari's views on intensity. Indeed, Szeemann can be considered as well-connected to (or even a player in) the contexts in which their concepts were developed.

The book may then share with the mega-exhibitions the embattled dominant position. In the post-Gutenberg age of electronic reading devices and internet publishing, the book as a printed object has arguably acquired a minor potency that attracts artists to it. If Kafka's usage of German had minor potency partly due to the colonial lag and the archaisms that entered, photography may today leave artists only a limited number of spaces for entering glitches, whereas the book turns out to be a soon-to-be archaic, formerly major commodity that can become the locus of minor engagement and intensities.

Indeed, Rodney Graham's contribution to another major art event, the Münster Sculpture Projects, 1987, unhinged the then still more prevalent modes of traditional, monumental public sculpture, entering the semi-private space of the bookshop window with a deceptively but deliberately simple, unsophisticated, archaic intervention: a book, *Cyclamen*, whose (Germanic, academic) design is destined to fail both in advertising terms and with regard to sculpture and 'the public.' It is an antithesis to traditional 'public sculpture,' as tested in Münster—but most often not tested in such clandestine, or minor ways.

The now minor space of the book is one that is being explored more and more by visual artists. To fill the demand for furthering creative writing skills in the visual field and problematize what artists do in this regard, Maria Fusco has set up and leads a Masters of Fine Art in Art Writing at Goldsmiths College, London. Fusco describes the art writing as a fertile environment, stressing the open-ended, speculative, uncertainty, obscurity, leaky interpretations etc. (Fusco, 2010). Emerging from the body of artworks showing the effects of canonical but very often minor writers in engaging ways, written, possibly 'literary,' artworks by visual artists are an identifiable area of artistic activity.[5] This activity is set to become even more widespread, is building community. This is clearly a locus of possible intensities and one hopes that the minor potentials in and of this field will continue to be found, and that stratification is still some way away.

In noting this increasing wish to professionalize the writing by visual artists, we may be pointing to quite a UK-specific disenchantment with art history and writing about art that has led artists to take matters in their own hands. It could also be one answer to the rise in status of the curator and, as writing is part of that 'job description,' artists may view writing as less removed from their realm. On the other hand, its proliferation could be a reaction to times of recession, too: writing is cheaper to produce and distribute than most visual art forms. Also in this sense, the inclination towards the cheaply reproducible work that can become the vehicle of engagement is, as mentioned, one towards the book. The history of conceptual art's deterritorialized use of text is being written further.[6]

The community of (former) DAAD artists evoked earlier, leads us in the current context to a double-edged sword: 'research.' The research element in the German Academic Exchange Service's remit and selection practice may have something to do with Graham's and Dean's positive attitude of towards writing. So-called 'practice-based' PhDs are also bringing artists to the book and to writing. However, one can also find a reterritorialization in that field that most often does not lead to texts that are in any way minor or particularly intense. Nevertheless (and very briefly, as this is an area hotly debated internationally that is not at the core of this essay), the distinct potential exists to work through the academic equivalent of Kafka's bureaucratic 'paper German' and come out at the other, the minor end. Deleuze and Guattari can provide useful tools for this.

The literary works that provided the focus here are placed on the margins of the visual art field, but they find their contexts and modes of viewing and distribution in it. They seem to become hybrids between visual artworks and criticism or scholarship, occupying an uneasy but effective space that has the hallmarks of the minor. Literature in its minor forms remains possibly one of the currently most interesting realms of engagement for visual artists. Let us hope that the inevitable co-option and reterritorialization is not approaching too fast and that artists will keep making their own rhizomes, reinventing the minor mode again and again, both in the literary mode and in photography.

Notes

[1] Deleuze and Guattari write of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett that 'As Irishmen, both of them live within the genial conditions of a minor literature [characterizing Joyce's method as] exhilaration and overdetermination [and Beckett's] as dryness and sobriety, willed poverty, pushing deterritorialization to such an extreme that nothing remains but intensities (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 19).'

[2] In Deleuze and Guattari's words: 'And it always ends like that, language's lines of escape: silence, the interrupted, the interminable, or even worse. But until that point, what a crazy creation, what a writing machine! (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 26).'

[3] Dean's curated *An Aside* exhibition, 2004/2005, which included Rodney Graham's work, could be viewed as yet another shift into related but somewhat unfamiliar, minor territories, importantly foregrounding the community of friends and likeminded creators around her in Berlin and elsewhere (Dean, 2005a).

[4] One can even call Graham's 'acting' practice as a whole a community of little Grahams, as—in Friedrich Meschede's words—'Graham the character plays himself without ever becoming identifiable as an individual (Meschede, 2010).'

[5] To explore these questions, I organized (with Karen Brown) the IAWIS focus conference *Displaying Word and Image* in Belfast, June 2010 with W.J.T. Mitchell as keynote speaker. The larger project has more recently yielded the exhibition *Convergence: Literary Art Exhibitions* at the Golden Thread Gallery, which I curated to chart the field from literary tourism to the more rewarding role that contemporary artists play in highlighting the engaged, minor aspects of literature through their own, thought-provoking works, including literary texts by artists and art writing (Lerm Hayes, 2011).

[6] Pavel Büchler, Simon Morris and Kenneth Goldsmith should be named as some of the artists whose 'extreme reading' and writing practices might bridge canonical conceptual practice with the kinds of texts discussed here. I would like to hint at how books and reading forge community in (artists') reading groups. I have found Joyce reading groups—famously the *Finnegans Wake* one at the Joyce Foundation in Zurich—polyvocal, minor (and addictive) communities.

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6 Entertaining Conceptual Art: Dan Graham on Dean Martin[1]

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Displaying a sly sense of wit, Dan Graham launched into a conversation with performance artist Michael Smith in a recent issue of *Artforum* by jauntily confessing there are two things he loves about television: 'First, the producer, who is something like a conceptual artist—someone like Norman Lear, who did *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*, or Allen Funt, who did *Candid Camera*. And then I love the stand-up comic on TV, who is also sometimes a conceptual artist, like Andy Kaufman (Griffin, 2004).' Some might be a little rattled by this analogy of the conceptual artist to an entertainer—and Graham has some obvious targets in mind—others might be take the comment in jest and leave it at that. But we do well to suppose that there is more to this joke than meets the eye. Although delivered in a seemingly off-handed manner, the artist's impromptu comparison of the television performer to the conceptual artist possesses a poignancy that reaches beyond any facile presumption concerning the all-too academic or 'serious' nature of conceptualism. Nor is it the case that Graham is suggesting that television now be considered a serious or major art, as such recent discussions of so-called 'quality TV' propose to do, even though he loves to debate the relative merits of late-night

Fig. 1 Michael Smith,
Mike's House, 1982.
Installation view,
Whitney Museum, New
York, 1982. © Courtesy
of the artist.

talk show hosts such as Jay Leno versus David Letterman (perhaps to no one's surprise, Graham endorses the former over the latter) and, more importantly, his own, first writings on television predates the invention of the academic discipline of television studies itself.

Let me clarify, then, why this joke merits our attention. How its further consideration will allow me, first of all, to contribute a few critical remarks on the manner in which the history of conceptual art and performance art has been constructed in dialectical opposition to mass cultural forms, such as television and its spectacular forms of entertainment. And, by way of extension, also to comment on the usefulness of the non-dialectical notions of minor and major practices, as developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in order to renew our acquaintance with conceptual and performance art—practices that have been mostly locked into a set of repetitive historical categories and fixed oppositions in the past two decades.[2] Although conceptual art continues to exert some pressure on the dominant modes of writing art history—Graham's witty comparison of the stand-up comedian to a conceptual artist troubles such knowledge—it seems

reasonable to state that conceptual art has achieved the status of a major art within our discipline. Graham's photo-essay *Homes for America*, for instance, or his film installation *Body Press*, that for a long time led at best a marginal existence in art historical accounts, have achieved widespread recognition since the 1990s. But, of course, the major or minor status of an art practice is not determined solely on the basis of such shifts in critical fortune. Marginality and minority are not synonymous. Nor is it the use of a medium with a potentially broad reach, such as television, that automatically secures the major value of an artistic practice.

In the *Artforum* interview both Graham and Michael Smith express a great deal of skepticism regarding the desire of many artists during the late 1970s, to leave video and performance behind and enter the mainstream, Laurie Anderson being named as one more successful example of such an exodus. Recalling this period, Smith, describes it as 'really curious:'

> It was a mixture of idealism, naïveté, and ambition. A lot of us were interested in expanding our audiences (...) There were also artists who made public access programs and were interested in reaching out to the community. I was never clear what that community was. All I know is that it went to bed very late. Then there were those who wanted to deconstruct TV but who had ambitions of making hit TV shows. But there really wasn't much room for artist's television (Griffin, 2004).

Michael Smith's own alter ego as performance artist, who is simply called 'Mike,' appears to be trapped in this curious space (fig.1). On the one hand, Mike was modeled 'after artists from that time who thought of public-access video as their artwork and a link to the community. Mike was very proud of his cable-access show *Interstitial*. Unfortunately it wasn't that good. The irony is that what Mike really got from all of his social involvement during the 1980s is a valuable piece of property, a loft in SoHo (ibid.).' But on the other hand Mike was also conceived as a 'silent majority' type, the representative of a bland demographics 'who would meet all the statistics of a Procter & Gamble focus-group participant (ibid.).' The premise of Smith's video performances was to ensnare Mike, as it were, in a televisual reality, where the everyday, conformist behavior of Mike would run up against the staged contingency of the variety show or sitcom series. Mike's negotiation of his surreal circumstances necessitated a delivery that followed a 'very slow, plodding timing' and assumed the features of a kind of dream time, as Graham

submits. Mike seems to inhabit a present that appears perpetually out of sync with itself. Indeed Mike dwells within an interstitial space as expressed by the title of his fictional cable-access show.

Here we are getting to the heart of what a minor practice entails. For a minor practice emerges, as Deleuze and Guattari expound in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* from the condition of living a language that is not one's own, or rather speaking a language that is either no longer or not yet known. The function of a minor literature, such as practiced by Kafka or Beckett—the Irish writer is a partial source of inspiration for the Mike character[3]—is to wrest the authoritarian power of a major language away from itself, to cause an arid and stereotypical mode of speech 'to vibrate with a new intensity' by placing its variables in constant variation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 19).

Considering that diversion is the name of the game that Smith and Graham are playing, allow me to insert a slight distraction of my own at this point. In the light of Deleuze and Guattari's argument I might note, namely, that one of Andy Kaufman's own performance routines became known as the 'Foreign Man:' an abject failure of a comedian utterly incapable of delivering a punch line on time. His miserable impersonations of public figures—'Hi, I'm Johnny Cash'—were delivered with the same squeaky, phony accent that he used to introduce himself. The act of mimicry does not even contain a change in intonation or inflection. Until, that is, the moment Kaufman assumes the stage identity of Elvis Presley and realizes an uncanny imitation of the rock star before an astonished audience. Kaufman can be said, therefore, to have perfected the role of the trickster or con man, a perpetual inventor of hoaxes that left the audience in bafflement, unsure how to respond. Is one laughing with the Foreign Man or at him or is one perhaps even laughing in spite of him, to hide one's own embarrassment? Like the fumbling act of the Foreign Man himself, the audience members are placed in a state doubt, confounded about the true nature of the situation they are facing. Our desire to enter into complicity with the comedian, sharing the same object of derision, is thwarted by Kaufman's act, if not completely denied. As spectators we go, as it were, in and out of sync with his stage persona.

I shall have an opportunity to return to Kaufman again, but the tug and pull that he displays between different linguistic ways of being, if you will, is personified as well by the befuddled Mike, who can only respond in a delayed fashion to the

imperatives placed upon him by the majoritarian language of television. When he displays enthusiasm for a cultural trend he is always 'behind the times,' as Graham notes. It is this in-between condition that connects Mike as televisual victim to what Deleuze and Guattari call a collective assemblage of enunciation; that is to say, Mike does not fully inhabit the domain of a major language, where personal concerns are expressed against a neutral social background, as a sitcom figure who is comfortably located in some generic suburban setting, rather Mike represents a domain of a minor discourse that is immanently and immediately political, even though Mike does not conduct politics in any overt sense of the word.

What is important here is that the character of Mike succeeds in displacing the question of politics away from the 1970s vision of cable-access television as providing the potential of 'out-reach,' to deliver an abstract, but ready-made community. Mike displaces politics that is to say, onto the primary or minor level of language where the relations between linguistic customs and corporeal habits are co-articulated, where language is grafted upon the impulses of the body. Smith's everyman or 'bland man' Mike is a figure who *should*, in a way, embody a majority language and epitomize a normative mode of behavior, yet he remains trapped within the interstitial, corporeal linguistic realm of the pun and the prank; that is, Mike is an individual who lives in a state of exception where one's automatic, habitual application of rules to a situation break-down. Mike, one might say, is not just hapless, he is clueless.

Significantly, the structural logic of Mike's performance is based on a central device of television programming, namely its division in discrete segments or what Stanley Cavell once called its 'current of simultaneous event reception (Cavell, 1982: 85).' What Cavell meant by this phrase was, among other things, to call attention to the fact that the formats of television are not only radically discontinuous in and between themselves, but are meant to allow the breaks and recurrences of programming to become instantly legible. 'The characteristic feature of [the television] programs,' Cavell maintains, 'is that they are presented as events, that is to say, as something unique, as occasions, something out of the ordinary. But if the event is something the television screen likes to monitor, so it appears, is the opposite, the *uneventful*, the repeated, the repetitive, the utterly familiar (ibid.: 89).' And like a bank of video screens within a control room, television's window that is set within the interior of the suburban home monitors the world like a surveillance device, acting as a protective shield against the unexpected and

unwarranted while providing 'comfort and company,' as Cavell asserts. It is the brilliance of Mike's performance to turn this logic against itself, destabilizing the relation of private to public, that which monitors and that which is monitored.

Let us call this central device of Mike's performance that of the *non sequitur*: the radical interruption that structures the simultaneous event reception of television, but that television also strives to de-potentialize or neutralize. The operational logic of television, that is, strives to pre-empt the appearance of a pure, undetermined event—the unexpected occurrence that is out of joint with a uniform, spectacular time—by leveling all televised events along one, uniform expanse of time. As Graham wrote in an essay of 1967, television simply throws together different pieces of information at the same time: 'It would seem that the medium regards itself transparently; as a stretch of neutral material extending a certain length of time which can be used to occupy a vacuum tube as long as nothing else is occupying it (Graham, 1993: 56).' But this procedure of the *non sequitur* is intrinsic to the nature of stand-up comedy as well and therefore makes this genre so conducive to the television medium. As Smith explains, 'it had this timing where you could just segue into something else without explanation. I was interested in the kind of short attention span of television' and, he adds, 'also maybe in drugs, you know (Griffin, 2004).'

Whereas the procedure of the *non sequitur* informs the whole performance of the stand-up comedian, it also points up the inner logic of the joke as such. A joke operates, namely, by perversely mimicking a syllogistic mode of reasoning, combining two incompatible thoughts in order to arrive at what might seem a deductive fallacy. Such is what Paolo Virno, in an exemplary text 'Jokes and Innovative Action,' identifies as the *paralogical* principle of the joke that places the categories of true and false in suspension and operates by creating a different combination of a set of given elements so that 'argumentation fluctuates from one to another meaning and in the end it is the least obvious and the most polemical that prevails (Virno, 2008: 143).' In developing this paralogic model of the joke, Virno is building, among others, upon Sigmund Freud's *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) where we can find the famous characterization of the joke in terms of 'the coupling of dissimilar things, contrasting ideas, "sense in nonsense", the succession of bewilderment and enlightenment, the bringing forward what is hidden, and the peculiar brevity of wit (Freud cited in Virno, 2008: 79).' Not, however that either Virno or I are inclined to follow the psychoanalyst's insistence on the latent content of the *Witz*. What I propose, rather, is that we retain

something of Freud's taxonomy of the joke, his analysis of those *rhetorical figures and patterns of thought* that structure the witty remark; in short, what Virno calls its logicolinguistic form. Rather than focusing on the unconscious content of the joke, I wish to call attention to its public and implicitly political character. To emphasize, 'the stringent nexus binding jokes to praxis in the public sphere' as Virno puts it so well.

A concrete example that immediately comes to mind in this context is the cut and paste or combinatory strategy that Graham used in his magazine pieces of the 1960s, such as *Homes for America* (1966) (pl. 5).[4] In this case, the artist used the stereotypes and clichés of publicity material and pop sociology to create a magazine piece that occupies a liminal space, a zone of indiscernibility between the different discourses of art criticism and sociology, listing, for instance, the likes and dislikes of adult males and females in relation to the exterior color variables of their standardized homes. *Homes for America* constitutes a network of 'quasi-discrete cells' that lack a perspectival center, like the suburban sprawl itself or, for that matter, the photo-grids of Eadweard Muybridge that provided a direct subtext for the magazine piece. Only a month after 'Homes for America' was published in *Arts Magazine*, Graham publishes 'Muybridge Moments' in the pages of the same magazine:

> The shots aren't linked—nothing is necessarily prior to something else. Things don't come from other things…What distinguishes one moment from another is a simple alteration in the positioning of things. Each object is re-arranged relative to every other object and to the frame. Things don't happen; they merely replace themselves in space…The model isn't going anywhere. *Her task isn't completed—no work is done* (Graham, 1967: 24).

Photography as resistance to work, as resistance to the very category of *the* work: I know no better definition of photography as minor art (even though Muybridge's understanding of his own project would have been quite different). In Graham's reading, each point of the photo-grid forms a singularity that allows movement to branch off in different directions. Paradoxically, the locomotive actions of the photographed body are not subjected in Graham's mind to either the directives of productive labor or the exigencies of narrative causality. Although Graham's interpretation goes against the grain of that *major* science of a disciplinary regime of modernity, namely psycho-technics, his view was shared by many of his fellow conceptual artists, such as Sol LeWitt and Mel Bochner. And it is this same

serialized organization of time and space that Graham will come to admire in the television variety show with its sudden, illogical jumps from one heterogeneous event to the next. Indeed the variety show is replete with abrupt deviations from the predictable axis of discourse, as Virno would say.

We do well, therefore, to consider *Homes for America* within the lineage of the hoax or practical joke, treating it as a distant family member of Kaufman's Foreign Man. To do so, of course, is not to dismiss the work on grounds of its being a 'mere joke' for that would be to assume the standpoint of a major art history, which, for instance, holds the categories of 'entertainment,' 'spectacle' and 'mediation' in strict separation from those of 'seriousness,' 'performance' or 'presence.'[5] What this realignment of the genealogy of conceptual art achieves is to expose the stringent nexus, as Virno says, that binds the joke to the public sphere. After all, Graham choose to describe the magazine piece in this fashion himself: 'When I did *Homes for America* [1966-67] it was a fake think piece about how a magazine like *Esquire* would often have a leading sociologist and a good photographer work together on a story. But my project actually wasn't about sociology (...) It's a cliché. And it was supposed to be humorous, flat-footed humor.' *Homes for America* calls into question the authoritarian voice of sociology—a voice that we will encounter again—by creating a parody of 'high' or 'quality' photojournalism to the great bafflement of the reader who is unsure which conceptual framework one should apply to the piece. And in a similar fashion, Graham would describe the phenomenological experience of Sol LeWitt's minimal objects as creating a 'discrete, non-progressive space and time,' that is to say, a non-hierarchical, non-centralized order, like Muybridge's photographs. LeWitt's work applies a (mathematical) rule to the point of absurdity, creating a confusion of the dialectical terms of inside and outside, subject and object at all levels of language, logic and fact. In fact, Graham surmises, this experiential effect is akin to the paralogical effect of the Cretan paradox that states 'I am a liar,' whereby self-referential structure, 'transparently intelligible at the outset, in its extension into complexity reaches a sort of inertia or logical indifference (Graham, 1969: n.p.).' We will see how this topological zone of blurring where the viewer and the work 'conjugate themselves in a endless reversal of subject/object positions' is developed in Graham's own performances. Suffice to say that Graham likes to stress, in a fully devious way, the entertainment factor of art, which explains his fondness for LeWitt's own joke that his sculptures functioned as a marvelous jungle gym for his cats.

Here is Virno's definition of the joke: 'Jokes are well defined linguistic games, equipped with unique techniques, whose remarkable function consists, however, in exhibiting the transformability of all linguistic games (Virno, 2008: 73).' In short, he defines jokes as the *diagram of innovative action*. The practical joke dwells fully within the contingent, where the normal rules of the language game are momentarily suspended. What the joke highlights is the gap that exists between a rule and its application or realization within a specific situation. As Wittgenstein once asked: 'But how can a rule show me what I have to do at this point (Wittgenstein cited in ibid.: 103)?' The logical conundrum consists of the fact that for every application of a norm to a specific situation one would need a further norm in order to determine whether the norm is correctly applied, ad infinitum. The decision how to apply a rule as Virno states, is an event that is fully heterogeneous to the rule. To apply a rule, is to identify a rule. The fulcrum of the joke is to show alternative ways of applying a rule, to proliferate the possibilities of application. In other words, I don't continue straight forward as the street sign directs me to do, but turn sideways: to digress is to innovate.

As Virno maintains, practical jokes are triggered on the occasion of a historical or biographical crisis, interrupting the circular flux of everyday experience, causing bafflement, amusement and, quite possibly, illumination of such moments where all our ordinary bearings are lost. He urges that we consider more closely such instants when a form of life, which appeared to be incontrovertible, runs into a kind of paradoxical situation that political theory has identified as a state of exception. That fleeting moment were the distinction between the grammatical plane—the rules of the language game—and the empirical plane—'the facts to which those rules ought to be applied'—becomes blurred and the arbitrary nature of linguistic customs and behavioral norms is revealed. 'Strange as it may seem,' Virno writes, 'the creativity of the linguistic animal is triggered by a *return*: by the intermittent return demanded by a critical situation, to the "normal everyday frame of life," that is, to that grouping of practices that make up the natural history of our species (ibid.: 118).' Virno refers here to Wittgenstein's notion of a natural history or *regularity* that forms the 'bedrock' of any conventional form of life.[6] When forced *to* suspend or discredit a given rule, we can only resort to the common behavior of mankind, to a regularity of aptitudes and of species-specific conduct. 'Suppose you came as an explorer into an unknown country with a language quite strange to you,' Wittgenstein inquires. 'In what circumstances would

you say that the people there gave orders, understood them, obeyed them, rebelled against them, and so on (Wittgenstein cited in ibid.: 115)?' There is skit by Kaufman in which he excitedly spouts a nonsensical language, inviting a woman from the audience on stage and proceeds to ask her questions, give her orders, etc., all in an completely unintelligible manner. In order to respond, the baffled woman must rely on such an anthropological notion as Wittgenstein's 'common behavior of mankind' that refers to such basic dispositions of the linguistic animal as commanding, questioning, storytelling, forming and testing hypothesis, guessing riddles or making a joke.

The regularity, to be sure, is not some super-rule, but the condition that allows a distinction to be made between the grammatical plane and empirical plane. It is a hybrid region where grammatical and empirical, nonlinguistic drives and verbal behaviors convert into one another. A threshold or no-man's land where language is grafted upon instinctual reactions, reorganizing them, creating a 'passage from perceptive-motor imagination to the metaphorical and metonymical phrases of language (ibid.: 119).' The regularity is what gives rise to innovative action. On the one hand it legitimizes eccentric, surprising and inventive applications of the given rule. On the other hand, the regularity can cause the transformation or even the abolition of the rule in question. These two forms of innovative action are inextricably intertwined. Only by varying its applications, time and time again, can one come to modify, or to substitute a certain rule.

But how does history enter into all of this? I would submit, first of all, that 'Jokes and Innovative Action' must be read together with Virno's better-known *A Grammar of the Multitude*. To recap the central thesis of the latter book, contemporary life is fully dominated by a post-Fordist organization of the labor process, whereby it is no longer the disciplining of individual bodies that counts, as in Fordist systems of production, but the servitude of the 'general intellect' or common linguistic and communicative abilities that are shared among all workers. Contemporary labor, therefore, has integrated within itself the performative or *virtuosic* properties proper to political discourse (depriving political discourse in turn of its constituent power within the public sphere). 'Every political action,' Virno writes, 'shares with virtuosity a sense of contingency, the absence of a "finished product"' and, as third and final component, 'the immediate and unavoidable presence of others (Virno, 2004: 53).' Post-Fordism replicates these three aspects of political or virtuosic performance by means of cooperative labor, requiring the presence of

others in a publically organized space and its mobilization of 'a taste for action, the capacity to face the possible and unforeseen, the capacity to communicate something new (ibid.: 63).' In other words, capitalism has been able to find a way to valorize the very faculty of thinking, the potential of language, to confront the contingent and unplanned without a predetermined script.

Of special interest to us is Virno's comment that the culture industry, even though fashioned upon a Fordist regime of production, pre-figures post-Fordism in requiring a space that was 'open to the unforeseen spark, to communicative and creative improvisation.' For Adorno and Horkheimer such unplanned elements were merely remnants of a past, which could not be fully regulated by the culture industry and persisted in those 'abrupt diversions that can enliven a television program,' yet it was such incommensurable events that were to contain the germ of future developments. Cavell already seems to grasp part of this argument when he suggested that television functioned as a kind of apotropaic device. In its constant monitoring of a world lacking consistency or permanence—a phenomenological fact which in itself is due to the serialized nature of the television format—television attenuates the spectator's anxiety even as it prompts it. Watching television, therefore, becomes like a series of random encounters between strangers, giving rise to verbal exchanges of a noncommittal nature. The talk show host is the one who mediates between the spectator and a world in which the old forms of life, with their separate idioms and institutions, are rapidly falling away. In an environment where we need to rely on the general intellect, on those general logical-linguistic constructs or 'common places' that form the skeleton of our patterns of speech, it is the talk show host that shows the spectator how to manage unforeseen situations and to defuse encounters with idle chatter and the exchange of empty pleasantries.

Allen Funt, creator of *Candid Microphone* and *Candid Camera*, and one of Graham's prototypical conceptual artists, actually acquired a degree in fine arts from Cornell University before moving into advertising and, later, the production of radio shows, where he developed his shtick of transforming surveillance into a means of entertainment. In a curious twist on the political aesthetics of the historical avant-garde, Funt's apparent intention was to register 'the beauty of everyday conversation' by means of a furtive technique of 'pure eavesdropping (Funt cited in Nadis, 2007: 14).' In doing so, as others have argued so well, Funt invented a new kind of performing artist that combined the roles of practical joker, sociologist, and confidence man (Nadis, 2007: 15). The success of *Candid Camera,* as

Funt has observed himself, relied on five factors: 'pure observation of the ordinary,' which did not prove compelling enough, hence the complementary aspects of 'wish fulfillment' (i.e. the identification of the spectator with Funt as a provocateur), the display of 'human frailties' (i.e. the public shaming of individuals for their vanity or greed), the exposure of the 'tricks of the trade' (i.e. how clients are mislead or cheated) and what he called the 'small crisis,' whereby the normal rules by which we negotiate everyday life are suddenly placed in abeyance, creating no small degree of bafflement on the part of the unsuspecting victim of the show (ibid.: 13). Frequently such pranks involve a kind of language game, using words in an improper sense or employing puns: 'Who do you think is the most superfluous actress acting today?'

In the words of one perceptive critic, Funt quietly probed 1950s Americans for their 'good citizenship' qualities: 'He dared his victims to act badly (ibid.).' A statement into which we may read an interesting *double entendre*: acting badly not means to misbehave, but also give a bad performance as an actor. I shall come back to this point, but what strikes me is that *Candid Camera* elicited not only a great deal of pleasure on the part of its audience, but apparently also a fair share of anxiety within the intellectual community. To many contemporary social critics, such as David Reisman who is known to have praised Funt as an 'ingenious sociologist,' *Candid Camera* not only revealed the involuntary habits of the average citizen, but also exposed in a damming fashion the supposed conformism of the American public. When confronted with a suspension of the normative framework of one's everyday routine, Funt's victims were only all-too-willing to succumb to the commands of a new authority. The Frankfurt school's psychological theorem of mass culture, which stated that the contemporary subject is highly susceptible to totalitarian rule appeared to have acquired empirical scientific proof.

Virno's post-Fordist multitude appears infected by a similar conformism. Forming a 'publicness without public sphere,' post-industrial labor threatens to subject the basic linguistic and communicative disposition of the human subject to hierarchical control. How might one exit from this subjection of the general intellect to the reproductive demands of capitalism? How is one to diverge from the score of those post-Fordist virtuosos, who perform their own linguistic faculties? To take flight, Virno suggests, is not different from changing the topic of a conversation that is already directed along well-defined tracks. 'Instead of choosing what it is best to do starting from certain basic conditions, we endeavor to modify these

conditions, that is, to modify the very "grammar" that determines the selection of all possible choices.' Our choice, therefore, is not between subjection or insurrection, but to cause an 'abrupt deviation in the axis of discourse;' to create, in other words, a kind of circuit breaker within a signifying system. And it is the joke that is best equipped to this task of creating a diversion, to provoke a variation of a form of life, if only on a microcosmic scale (Virno, 2008: 73).

But then what are we to make of the television show host? Does he epitomize the post-Fordist virtuoso, as Cavell seems to have predicted, or does he retain something of that redeeming factor that the historical avant-garde once associated with the vaudeville tradition or, what Eisenstein called, the 'theater of attractions?' This is a very broad question, which I cannot deal with in full here. However, I would like to briefly look at an exceptional essay by Dan Graham, 'Dean Martin/Entertainment as Theater,' written in 1967, which will provides us with a partial answer, before I end with a few cursory notes on Graham's performances from the turn of the decade.

Graham organizes his text around the quasi-naïve question whether Dean Martin's public image of 'stiff stupor and slap-happy sloth' is truthful or not:

> Who is the *real* Dean Martin? His supposed stupor, replete with jarring silences, is a deliberate but awkward concealment, calling attention to the duplicity of his role-playing. The combined lack of grasp of the script role (the 'real' Dean Martin presumed drunk and misunderstanding the nature of the character proscribed for him by the lines) gives him an odd self-consciousness (…) shared complicity of audience as structural pivot on which the show totteringly balances (Graham, 1993: 60).

This 'dumb-show' put on by a the variety show host, who openly reads his lines from so-called idiot cards, Graham infers is clearly fake. The complicity that is created between the spectator and Dean Martin, acts to eliminate distance, to create an intimacy between the two. Such self-consciousness of the audience members is most intense when Dean Martin 'levels' with them, treating them as a 'dumb prop' for his confidences. Talking directly to the camera, Dean Martin confides in his spectators—those 'embarrassed-for him' intimates—although the viewer needs to consider that show host might have mistaken the camera for a guest in his addled state of mind.
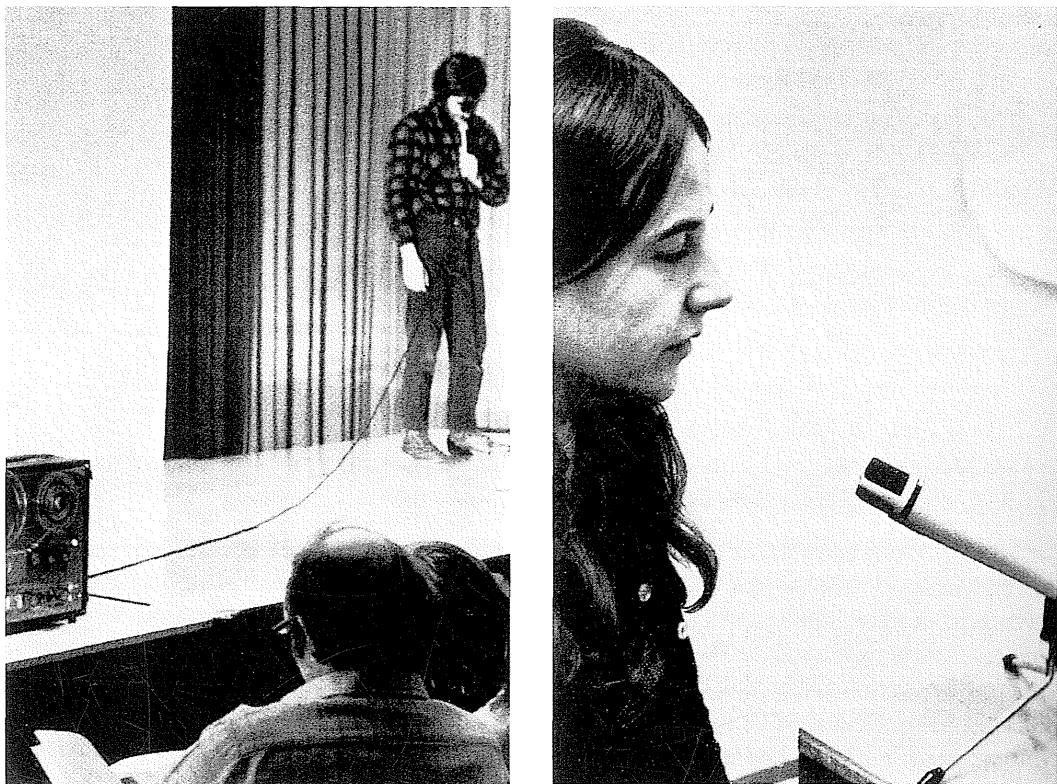
What Dean Martin's charade shows up, in Graham's judgment, is that television presents an illusion of familiarity, yet in the end operates as a medium of self-alienation. The television show has even absorbed a Brechtian device of defamiliarization: Dean Martin's stumbling style of acting, the sloppy, erratic editing: the whole performance shows a *contempt* for the medium. One might equally state, although these are not Graham's words, that Dean Martin personifies a Sartrean project of bad faith, which is typified by the famous example of the café waiter in *Being and Nothingness*—yet another representative of performative labor—who 'plays at *being* a waiter,' mechanically imitating the customary gestures of his profession. By means of an excessive acting-out, the waiter refuses to identify himself with the social role he is forced to play. Yet by this very act of resistance, the waiter also acquiesces to the facticity of his social station. He lives in a state of permanent self-deception. Dean Martin, on the other hand, openly embraces such a project of bad faith, converting the waiter's existential conflict into an entertaining act of

self-contempt. The zone of indiscernibility inhabited by the on-screen Dean Martin—is he in full possession of his wit?—brings us to that grammatical/empirical gap, that experiential threshold which gave the sociologist pause in relation to *Candid Camera*. Yet in the case of the Dean Martin Show, if Graham is correct, the spectacle tames this unruly space by enforcing a complicitous relationship between host and spectator: 'everything is scripted.' Alienation has simply become second nature; a joke at our own expense.

Nevertheless, there is an excessive quality to this show that continues to fascinate Graham and comes back to haunt the spectator at the end of the show. After Dean Martin bids his viewers good night, the camera pulls back and we see the technicians clearing the set and hear the sound of the lights being switched off. And at this very moment, Graham declares, 'we become aware of an incredible, inexplicable time or generation gap, for the image we are currently seeing is evidently after the fact, although live, as we are still watching (Graham, 1993: 63-64).'[7] What we witness is the phenomenon of 'dead time,' but is this the empty, uneventful time of the vacuum tube or that 'bedrock' to which all forms of life must return?

Clearly, Graham's text remains somewhat cryptic, which is only true to the nature of the paralogical terrain it explores. However, in conclusion, I would like to point out a few salient features of Graham's own contemporary performances. What they hold in common, namely, is Graham's attempt to hew close to that threshold between the grammatical and the empirical where language appears to sink back into the pulsations of the body. Indeed Graham's performance approaches that same liminal form of speech that Deleuze and Guattari associated with the phenomenon of a minor literature where 'language stops being representative in order to now move toward its extremities or its limits (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 23),' a neutralization of sense, a non-sense, where value may resides in nothing more than an accenting or inflection of a single word, in no more than an unfurled sequence of intensities (ibid.).

In Graham's *Lax/Relax* (1969), for instance, the verbal is linked to the aspirative, to a mere breathing of words (fig.2). A girl is instructed to say the word 'lax' and then to breath in and out. She repeats this pattern for thirty minutes while her voice is tape-recorded. Later, in front of a live audience, the tape is played while Graham repeats the word 'relax' to himself, breathing in and out after each reiteration of the word. As Graham's performance notes read: 'I am centered in self-absorption (...)

[whereas] the audience may become involved in its own breathing responses and thus locate the surface of its involvement; its attention is somewhere between inside my breathing and its relation to the girl or its own breathing (Graham, 1981a).'

Other performances tilt towards a more deliberate dismantling of ordinary language games, creating a divergence between two interlocutors whose speech begins to stutter, disintegrating into a series of monosyllabic words, interjections, and pauses. These interruptions of the flow of speech acts as blockages, but also create openings for the other to divert the axis of discourse. In *Past Future/Split Attention* (1972) two people who know each other are located in the same space (fig.3). While the first person (A) continuously predicts the second person's future behavior, the latter (B) recounts by memory the former's past behavior. Here is a part of the transcription:

> B: You'll find that you'll need to escape from the kind of…um… escape from the kind of…ah…kind…of limitations that this sort of situation has on the sort of things you are going to say. (…) You'll be silent on and off. You'll have to, be; pause between words, pause will sometimes be greater, sometimes less…ah… you'll not like the idea that I'm making you silent.

> A: You have found…have brought about the situation where I find it very difficult to say anything… we have now very much started to talk about… um…very closely, a kind of, a very close thing between me talking about your past and talking about your past and you talking about my future…I WON'T BE SILENT. YOU HAVE NOT MADE ME SILENT.

At which point A struggles to change the topic and escape the dictates of B:

> You have been making me listen to you for a short period (…) Sometime ago you used to do pictures which were rather like, um, Frank Ardvark or that other bloke whose name I can't remember (Graham, 1981b).

Graham has explained how his performances of the 1970s were linked to the contemporary desire of artists to establish alternative modes of community; a desire fed in part by the rapid commercialization of the art world. He comprehended the performance, therefore, as a democratic model of constituent power, as a kind of intersubjective, political act that instituted a topological relation of feedback between performer and audience. At the same time, he was interested in 'dissecting' the authoritarian model of the 'performer-politician' epitomized by Joseph

One person predicts continuously **the** other person's future behavior;
while the oth er person recalls (by memory) his opposite's past be-
havior.

Both are in the present so knowledge of the past is needed to con-
tinuous deduce future behavior (in terms of causal relation). For
one to see the other in terms of present attention there is a mirror-
relflection (of past/future) cross of effect(s). Both's behavior be-
ing reciprocally dependent on the other, each's information of his
moves is seen in part as a reflection of the effect their just past
behavior has had in reversed tense as the other's views of himself.
For the performance to proceed, a simultaneous, but doubled attent-
ion of the first performer's 'self' in relation to the other('s im-
pressions) must be maintained by him. This effects cause and effect
direction. The two's activity is joined by numerous loops of feed-
back ⟵——⟶ and feedahead words and behavior.

Fig. 3 Dan Graham,
*Past Future/Split
Attention*, 1972. ©
Courtesy of the artist.
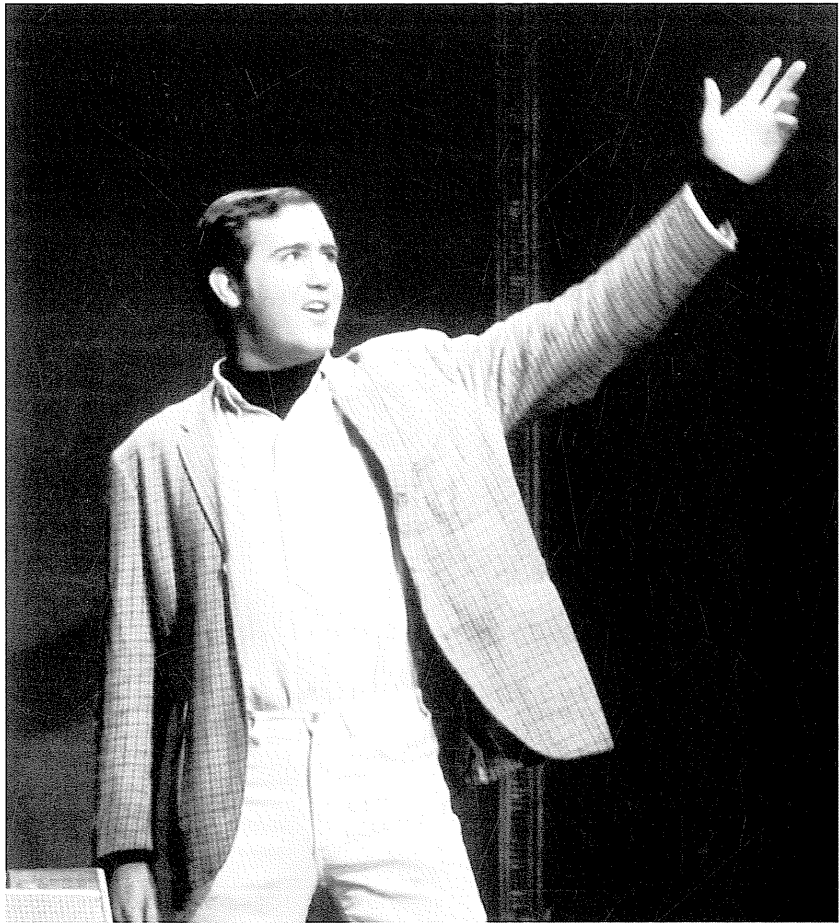
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Beuys. Elsewhere I have described how Graham modeled his performances on the micropolitics of new social groups, their techniques of video feedback and tape delay, in order to disturb or 'unfreeze' their habitual application of rules to life (de Bruyn, 2006). Yet Graham never made the mistake of believing in the actual realization of community as a group-in-fusion. If one is not to duplicate the hierarchical strategies of the performer-politician or the complicitous mechanisms of the television host, one must forever postpone the moment of being in sync with one's audience. Perhaps this is how Graham would have us understand the act of Andy Kaufman, who stands next to a record player in an awkward pose, slightly twitching with his fingers, as he listens in silence to the Mighty Mouse theme song

(fig.4). Then, suddenly, he springs into action lip-syncing the single line 'Here I Come to Save the Day.' For this one fleeting moment, as he raises his arm in triumph and mouths those heroic words, Kaufman appears to connect with his audience, only to sink back once more into a bodily state of unease.

Notes

[1] This text was first presented during the conference 'Minor Photography: The Case of (Post)Surrealism' hosted by the Lieven Gevaert Centre for Photography in Leuven, 19-20 November 2010. I would like to thank the organizers Hilde Van Gelder, Jan Baetens, and Mieke Bleyen for their kind support as well as Ellen Blumenstein, Fiona Guess and Felix Ensslin who were instrumental in the genesis of the present text.

[2] On the writing of a 'minor history' in the context of the 1960s, see Branden W. Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage* (New York: Zone, 2008), passim.

[3] Michael Smith: 'my influences were Tati, Keaton, Richard Foreman, Acconci, Wegman, and Beckett filtered through the construction of stand-up.'

[4] 'Homes for America' was first published in *Arts Magazine*, 41, 3 (December/January, 1966-1967), however the original layout of Graham was not used.

[5] To cut a long argument short that would include such notions as Peggy Kamuf's 'ontology of performance' or Joseph Kosuth's tautological conception of the conceptual work of art.

[6] As Virno clarifies, this bedrock of which Wittgenstein speaks does not constitute an universal, fixed ground of human behavior but an indeterminate zone of translation between the body and language. In art history a similar discussion has unfolded in relation to Cavell's notion of the *automatisms* or conventions of a medium. See, among others, Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the PostMedium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000) and Diarmund Costello, 'On the Very Idea of a "Specific" Medium: Michael Fried and Stanley Cavell on Painting and Photography as Arts,' *Critical Inquiry*, 34, 2 (Winter, 2008): 274-312.

[7] I cannot give full credit to this dense text, which roams across examples of avant-garde film (Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt*, Andy Warhol's *The Life of Juanita Castro*) and ends with a lurid description of Graham's visit to a New York nightclub called Cerebrum, where 'guides' hand out props for visitors to play with collectively, thus creating a growing awareness that 'we are our own entertainment tonight (if "stoned", "living" our fantasies) as we are here.'

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part **3**

Surrealism in Variation
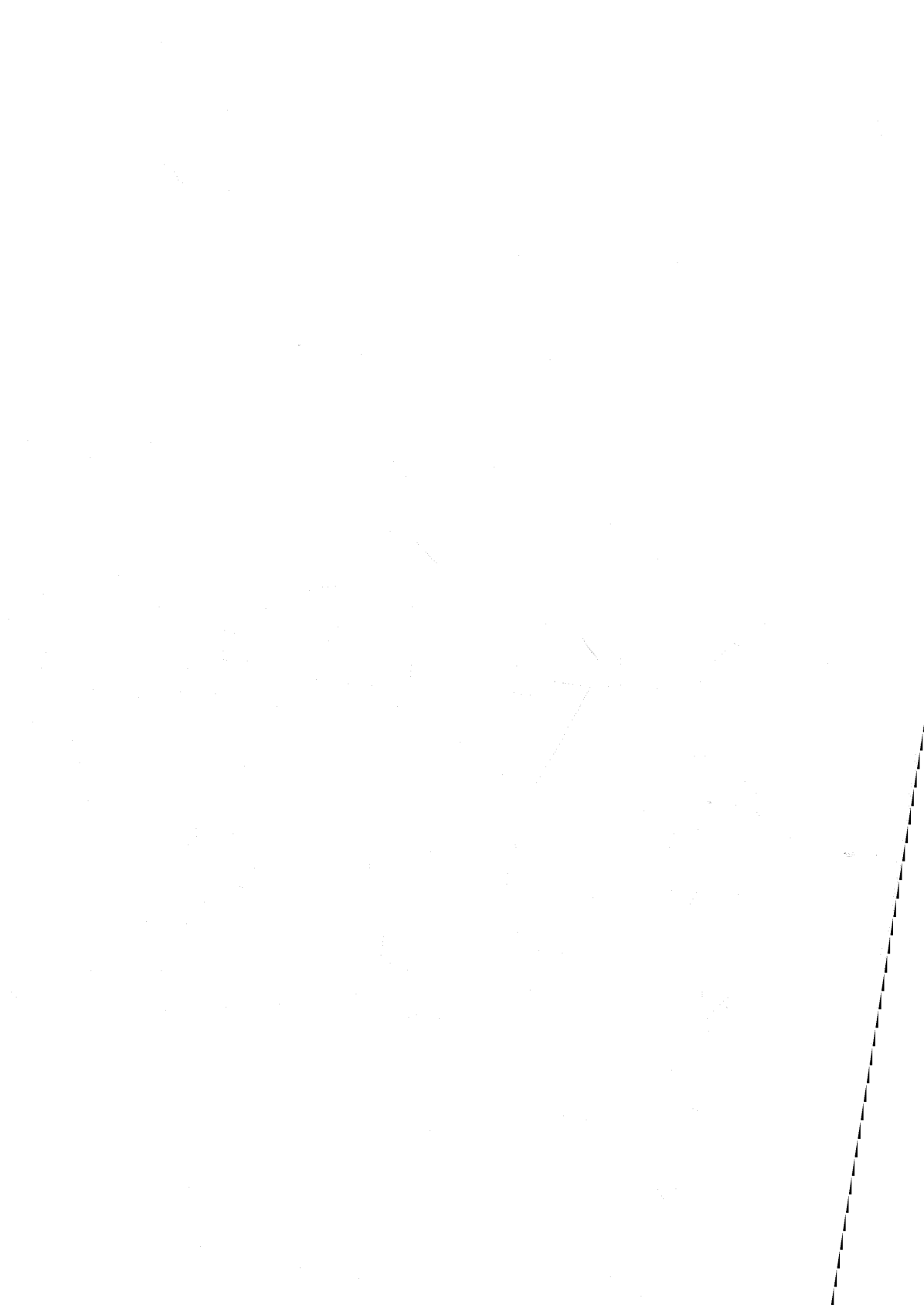
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Towards a Minor Surrealism: Paul Nougé and the *Subversion of Images*

Frédéric Thomas

Translation to English: Aarnoud Rommens

In the dead of winter of 1929-1930, Paul Nougé—the main theorist of Belgian Surrealism—produces a series of nineteen photos, gathered under the title *Subversion of Images* [Subversion des images]. He makes the series within a specific context where three key moments are conjoined, three crises: that of Surrealism, that of photography, and, more generally, of society as a whole.

It is in the spring of 1929 that the special issue of the Belgian magazine *Variétés* is published, centered on the present state of Surrealism, thus presenting a kind of balance sheet presaging the ruptures, polemics, and the reformulation of Surrealism, such as it would appear only a few months later in the 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism.' For the Belgian side, always attentive to the activities of the Parisian group, while also careful to maintain a certain distance, a certain autonomy, the time had also come for a first assessment. Nougé presents a paper at a conference in Charleroi, which will become one of the major texts of the Surrealist movement in this country. As for photography, the watershed of the 1930s is marked by important debates around pictorialism, New Objectivity, photography's status as 'document' or work of art, but also by the move toward autonomy of the

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photographic medium, which now constructs its own history, a specific space of its own while introducing self-referential criteria. Of course, these tensions and reformulations are linked with other crises on a global level: The Wall Street Crash of 1929, the rise of fascism and the establishment of Stalinism in the USSR.

Skimming through the plates of *Subversion of Images*,[1] one will recognize several Belgian Surrealists in the photos and will see that the plates are stagings; in a way, they are installations. Indeed, in essence, these photos stage *absence* (Levy, 2007: 70-82). Absence of objects or absence in a more metaphorical sense, merely suggested through sleep, the ghost or death. The importance of writing and the recurrence of some objects must also be stressed: scissors and the sponge. In a general way, they exude a feeling of uncanniness and a sense of threat, highlighted by the action or expression of the persons in the image, through the paradoxical collision between the staging and the outward sobriety of style, through the framing or by something more muted, something sly.

Marcel Mariën asserts that what was attempted in *Subversion of Images* was the exploration of 'the poetic effectiveness through the means of photography (Mariën, 1982: 130).'[2] Each term—effectiveness, poetry, means and photography—has its importance and sketches the outlines of a strategy. In this case it is developed at the crossroads of photography and Surrealism, engaging the one with the other, playing off the one against the other, thus engendering a kind of double play participating in the parasitic model of Belgian Surrealism.

I would like to focus on the 'manifesto' that constitutes *Subversion of Images*. In it, both photography and Surrealism are worked through from the inside, parasitized and reorganized according to the mode of the minor so as to open up an alternative version that blurs a series of Surrealist landmarks.

Document, Documentary, Surrealism

The first signpost, the first displaced Surrealist line and disturbed reference point is that of style. These photos evince manifest affinities with Magritte's canvases, be it on the level of themes, scenes, research, word play and mirrors, or of working with ordinary objects. For example, the painting *The Charms of the Landscape,* [Les charmes du paysage] (1928) as well as *Character Meditating on Madness* [Personnage méditant sur la folie] (1928)—two images contemporaneous with *Subversion*

Fig. 1 Paul Nougé, *The Birth of the Object*, from the *Subversion of Images* series, 1929/1930, photographic print by Marc Trivier. © Bruxelles, *Archives & Musée de la Littérature* © SOFAM.

of Images—have their counterpart in the photos *The Birth of the Object* [La naissance de l'objet], (fig.1)[3] and *The Attic* [Le Grenier]. In a general way however, these correspondences constitute 'a putting into images of the theory of "disturbing objects" as Nougé had defined it,' and are inscribed within the commitment to a realist, objective technique that supports this project (De Nayer, 1995: 9).

However, I would like to underscore the affinities with a contemporary text by Nougé, i.e. *La chambre aux miroirs* [The Chamber of Mirrors] (Nougé, 1994: 29-42). The affinities are already apparent in the title: the intimate, familiar and hermetically closed space of the room combined with the mirror, partaking in a game of representation—themes haunting the paintings of Magritte and the photos of Nougé. So, what are we dealing with then? With the visits, in the form of numbered

sequences, by thirty-seven women to a medical practice. To each photo corresponds a short clinical description of a few lines—the shortest comprises a sentence of a few words, while the longest is five paragraphs—where physical features are annotated (smell, curve, the forms of the breasts, etc.) and information on the status of the patient (age, profession, family status). By virtue of its montage, its recourse to seriality and its writing, the text borrows, much like *Subversion of Images*, from the documentary style. From this perspective it is perhaps closer to the series of sixteen women photographed in the New York subway, between 1938-1941, by one of the 'inventors' of the documentary style, Walker Evans. Here we are also struck by the sharpness and instantaneous, the economy of means, the withdrawal, or even the apparent neutralization of the author. In addition, the series consists of portraits of women only, and foreground their transitory character—the passage, in transit, hazardous and anonymous. Finally, the foregrounding of the series—further accentuated by Nougé as the last number, thirty-eight, is formed by a line of points, thereby underscoring its continuation—highlights that we are dealing with an extract only, with a passage taken from a larger ensemble. All these characteristics are borrowed from the 'documentary style' as defined by Evans.

However, this style is simultaneously used and transgressed by Nougé. Firstly, it must be noted that the principle, the author's claim to non-intervention, is distorted or at least largely corrected (both with Evans and Nougé alike) by a deliberate, conscious montage and the integration into a clear overall design. This is especially evident in the case of Nougé, who strives to make room, starting from 'documentary' writing, for a maximum of striking effects, in order to explore them and spread out their implications. This explains the intensity and particular beauty of this text. This form of verbal process—the *procès-verbal* so to speak—seems intent in installing the reader in a certain disposition, drawing out a line of cold and calm attentiveness, so as to exploit his availability all the better and underline the slightest variation and by doing so assure that the slightest element will receive the maximum power of perplexity.

Variations and differences are distributed and orchestrated in such a strategic way—with certain comments added as if they are the most 'natural' thing to say, as if added merely in passing—that they begin to distort the clinical annotations, allowing to show through a certain insistence of the gaze where eroticism tears apart the apparent neutrality. And so, here it is a matter concerning the 'true coral of literature (6),' while further on 'delightful (9),' vertebras are mentioned

or indeed, 'reserved, delightful music (28).'[4] For the most part, there is a game of correspondence between the nakedness of these women and the idea of the 'naked truth,' inscribed onto the body itself: it is worn down by work, subject to conjugal oppression, and made to reveal erotic creases. It would be there as the objective, bodily truth that clothes it, a social disguise, which a casual or absent-minded glance would only covering up or conceal. Four times (in 11, 17, 32 and 37), a disruptive description appears, a direct intervention of the 'doctor,' which changes the register, making both the author and the reader intervene. The only boy of the series, branded as a 'revolting spectacle' and opposed to the mother, who is 'perfectly desirable;' the last but one annotation before the suspension points, which ends by an interpellation: 'This for those who are surprised that it is possible to make love to old women (37).' Strategically placed within the series, notes 17 and 32 appear both as revelations and illuminations:

> It should have sufficed with one word, a single word that was not spoken. And never, never will I know what breasts veiled the small brassiere ready to come undone, what belly, what hips, what hair concealed the short, opaque and cowardly trousers (...).
> I will never forgive myself for this second of weakness (17).[5]
> This erotic hypothesis is ventured: 'She must cry out when she comes, crying out insults; or else, shut herself in a black silence (32).'[6]

In reality, the pseudo-neutrality of the annotations with their scientific air constitutes a condition, a catalyst for eroticism, of which these two notes reveal the stakes. This smokescreen of neutrality ties in with Nougé's exploration of the co-option of popular erotic work and aims at reversing the mechanized, de-eroticized chain of mass production in serial form, in which, in Kracauer's famous expression, the movement of the bare legs of the dancers of the Tiller girls corresponds to the hands in the factory and Taylorism.

Yet, the work of writing performed here exceeds the frame of eroticism and finds its correspondence in *Subversion of Images*. To the interrogation of bodies, on the one hand, corresponds that of objects on the other, but both are in search of the same effects. Erasure, the withdrawal of the author and the presumed naturalism of the gaze serve, paradoxically, to lend power to montage and staging. They sanction the usage of the documentary style, specific to photography (and to cinema), but the application of which is spread out, and more significantly, diverted in

both. This highlights the different procedure adopted by Belgian Surrealism with respect to Paris. In *The Chamber of Mirrors* as well as in *Subversion of Images*, there is a commitment to anti-lyricism, which attempts to open up a different approach from the lyricism of Breton or Éluard, and, at the photographic level, from the experiments of Man Ray; a route that however does not abandon lyricism, but advances it in a covert manner. Clearness, concision, economy of style constitute an alternative to a certain idealism, and a call to a more lucid and critical usage of our means, which does not overlook the disenchantment of the contemporary world. This stricter detour is the route best adapted to illumination, to the marvelous. The disproportion between the implementation of the 'documentary' technique, sobriety of notes and objects, the displacement, and upsetting of the detail on the one hand, and on the other hand an atmosphere charged with a force of the uncanny, the erotic or ominous that is released, constitutes one of the privileged equations of Belgian Surrealism. It marks the superiority of surprise, of the wonder grown from the soil of the familiar and ordinary, and is inscribed within the theory of 'disturbing objects' [objets bouleversants]. It concerns the objectifying value of words, feelings, everyday objects, which, as oblique, isolated and placed in certain conditions can exercise an unsettling effect upon vision, representation, the relations we maintain with objects and with others.

In *Les images défendues* [Defended Images], a study dedicated to the painting of Magritte, based on the pages of *Une saison en enfer* [A Season in Hell] where Rimbaud expresses his predilection for 'bad paintings: hanging above doors, on sets or carnival backdrops, billboards, cheap prints (Rimbaud, 2002: 208),' Nougé speaks of the effectiveness of the 'linen walls of fairground stalls, on the signs of the boutiques in the suburb' precisely because of 'their singular concern in creating pictures as obvious and as loaded with meaning as possible, independent of any aesthetic consideration concerning beauty and originality (Nougé, 1980: 249-250).'[7] The point was to bring these images closer to the 'illusory objective reality of photograph' and 'illustrated school textbooks of the end of the nineteenth (ibid.).'[8] This illustrates one of the charms of the documentary style, since its pretense to precise, significant, demonstrative and clear vision seemed to be analogous to artistic pomp. Therefore, the effectiveness of this type of photograph, presenting itself as a 'document,' paradoxically prides itself on the pretensions and oppositions/indeterminacies it institutes: objective/subjective, Modernity/Romanticism, document/art, mechanical/aesthetics, etc. Of course, these

antagonisms are constructed and problematic. All the same, they provide Nougé with a basis for their instrumentalization, by parasitizing their claim to 'exact evidence,' of photographic 'probity' as well as the medium's 'scientific' value. By diverting them in an artistic counter-direction, they are made to participate in the program of Belgian Surrealism, which attempts to amplify the disorder of art and of reality, while at first sight seeming to opt for an anti-lyricism in favor of a more sober, more materialist understanding of illumination.

Nougé only intervenes in the debate between art and documentary in a transversal and transgressive manner. He merely uses these positions and oppositions in an opportunely strategic way, in order to make them function against their own principles, and from quite a different perspective. He plays with and on so-called artistic and documentary, antagonistic or specific characteristics, in a detached manner without ever adhering to their pretensions. This divertive usage of the documentary method utilized in the *Subversion of Images* has its cinematic equivalent in the 1933 film by Buñuel, *Land without Bread* [Las Hurdes: Tierra Sin Pan]. The work has provoked numerous polemics as to its status: ethnological, social documentary, or Surrealist film, and every position in-between. In fact, just like with Nougé's photos, the film deliberately blurs the definitions and boundaries between the documentary, art and Surrealism so as to better subvert and interrogate the question of the status and reliability of what is seen. *Land without Bread* hurls cruel and abrupt images to its viewers, in the purest of documentary styles, but are sharply contrasted and systematically displaced by the music (a symphony of Brahms), and, in voice-over, by a cold, distanced, dry commentary.[9] A calculated terseness of course, much like the writing in *La chambre aux miroirs*. Besides, it operates on a more general level, since there is nothing gratuitous about both the work of Buñuel and the writings and photos of Nougé. What is at stake is the exposing of literary and filmic effects and to wonder about their effectiveness, fragility, and legitimacy. Following the example of collage, in Buñuel's film as well as in *Subversion of Images*, the various elements of the montage enter into a collision course in order to break the linearity of narration to create a singular, redeeming shock. The alleged objectivity of the documentary style is employed, distorted in its supports, thus disturbing the pretenses of the medium and, more fundamentally, of reality itself, in order to mobilize this shock effect that lays bare the accidents of the real through which the world takes flight, to evoke Guattari and Deleuze's beautiful metaphor. In both cases, the transgressive usage of the documentary form thus aims at provoking a

reaction, at putting our indifference to the test, our devotion to the world as usual, and, finally, to challenge reality and the audience.

Automatism, Registration, Conscious Action

The three photos—*The Birth of the Object* [La naissance de l'objet] (fig.1), *The Vintages of Sleep* [Les vendanges du sommeil], and *The Depths of Sleep* [Les profondeurs du sommeil]—refer to a second tenet of the 'Surrealist canon,' to its 'historic' methods: the time of sleep, automatic writing and the 'interior model.' Yet, they distort its meaning, operating on a double internal criticism: of the photograph as recording, as the production of the 'instantaneous,' and of Surrealism as '[p]sychic automatism in its pure state (...). Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised (Breton, 1969: 26).' It is at the heart of the analogy between photography and writing, at the level of photography as ' structural metaphor of automatism,' as Michel Poivert (2005: 78) phrases it, that Nougé intervenes. *The Vintages of Sleep* stages a clash between the photographic document and the poetic document, automatic writing and dream narrative, thus doubling the absence of intervention, and by functioning more as a riddle, an invitation to imagine the word to come, so as to continue, to rewrite the poem. Against the passivity of automatism—the 'formula of a new quietism (Nougé, 1980: 207)'—Nougé opposes a conscious strategy of writing and rewriting; a procedure of intervention, an internal operation to prevent the world from recreating its old model. Through a montage of words, images and objects, in the form of equations, poetic and infernal machines, he aims at bursting open, from the inside of the sentence, our habits, and with them our indifference.

Banality—Marvelous

Photography and Surrealism feed the idea of a world already there and of a marvelous layer above or alongside everyday reality, which could be made to spring up, come to the surface by virtue of a particular perspective: the objective eye of the camera or a better attunement to the unconscious and chance. Only a defect of vision, only a certain disposition can therefore get us in tune with this reality and its marvels, with its wonders, with this higher interior world, of which

automatism invites us 'to watch for the hatching of miracles (ibid.).' The relation between the everyday and the marvelous is doubly reformulated in this case. On the one hand, and contrary to the somewhat idealist and romantic vision of the Parisian group who entertained too strict and static an opposition between the banal and the marvelous, which would return from below or was located on a higher level in a surreality, the Belgians affirm the existence of a paradoxical proximity between the register of banality, the everyday, and of disruption, the marvelous. This is a marvelous of a more prosaic character that is not foreign to play and humor. On the other hand, we live in a manufactured world where the marvelous and the everyday are no longer given. It is then not so much a matter of recuperating the marvelous as of inventing it. To contemplation, Nougé opposes the primacy and commitment to action. 'Seeing is an act' he asserts; an act linked to desire, to interest, to habits of seeing or not seeing this or that thing (ibid.: 228).[10] Hence the game of displacements, of combinations and of manipulations of objects and pictures, which are intended to disturb the mental constructions, to break the impunity of objects, as in the photos *The Drinkers* [Les buveurs] and *The Birth of the Object* [La naissance de l'objet]. The latter image puts the emphasis on the search rather than the find, and supposes a reaction of the viewers of the photograph that mimics that of the characters in the photo, since the object about to be born depends on their attention and their desire, and does not exist apart from this intervention. In return, the commitment to technical austerity, to an economy of means is reasserted; the absence of a single object unsettles representation.

War, Guerrilla

The sequence of photos—*Cut Eyelashes* [Cils coupés] (fig.2) and *Revenge* [La vengeance]—of course refers to the infamous scene where the eye is sliced in the film *Un Chien Andalou* by Buñuel and Dali, which was released just shortly before the photographs. The photo sequence however denotes a different strategy: instead of open war it engages in a guerrilla operation. The violent, direct attack takes on a more subtle, a more metaphoric turn, while, in parallel, the techniques used are more sober. The Belgians are wary of garrulousness, the incantatory appeal to magical words such as 'revolution,' 'desire,' 'Surrealism;' they are suspicious of the reproduction of scandals that only serve to exhaust the initial force of subversion and that now, paradoxically, sustain the art world. Instead, they put their faith in

Fig. 2 Paul Nougé, *Cut Eyelashes*, from the *Subversion of Images* series, 1929/1930, photographic print by Marc Trivier. © Bruxelles, *Archives & Musée de la Littérature* © SOFAM.

an irregular struggle, so much more molecular than molar, operating from within, through ruses, sidesteps and sudden blows.[11]

The shock of the 'sliced eye' cannot be reproduced indefinitely. By dint of being repeated, the public is in danger of becoming accommodated to it, of taking pleasure in it, while misery and revolt tend to be transmuted into objects of consumption, feeding rather than transforming the artistic institution. It is in this respect that Nougé speaks of 'comfortable scenes:' 'Sure enough, there is also a certain comfort in the cataclysm, a comfort of terror, very much in fashion these days... After that, it all stops (ibid.: 268-69).'[12] Thus, Belgian Surrealism does not so much try to wed art to politics as to transform them completely, to move the lines,

to break their immunity and to overturn their interrelations so as to make them function differently, according to the unique revolutionary compass.

In that case, the photographic experience allows for a reaffirmation of the dialectic of means and ends, of politics and art. What is of primary importance to Nougé is the Surrealist project, its extra-artistic purpose, which in turn must orient and legitimate art. Thus, what he claims of music in the 'Conference of Charleroi' also holds of art in general:

> Music, left to its own devices, will soon enough turn out wrong.
> As free play, it tires the players, and no longer serves anything—it becomes good for nothing.
> It is therefore necessary, at all costs, to discover or to invent an end external to it, which dominates it, orientates it and justifies it (ibid.: 201).[13]

This therefore presupposes a double minor treatment of photography and of Surrealism, as well as a particular usage of means. Art is a means, a weapon—a privileged one, for sure—one that is always subordinated to an end that exceeds it. Consequently, it is essential to achieve a certain freedom, a certain detachment with respect to the means, and to implement an 'experimental discipline.' Not only is it necessary to refuse to cling to one single means or solely to artistic means, but it is also vital to reject the hierarchy established between the arts, between means, because this hierarchy 'is, in short, but an ambiguous weapon handled by a class that refuses to die (ibid.: 255).'[14] And the 'revolutionary spirit' that animates both the poor as well as the refined means implemented by the Surrealists, 'confers onto them an equal and sufficient dignity (ibid.: 256).'[15] Nougé reproaches Parisian Surrealism for its tendency to implicitly reproduce a conception of art, and with it a bias in the division of labor at the basis of society, while in addition placing too much confidence in art's capacity to transform its own institutional grounding. It is essential to adopt a stance of critical lucidity in relation to the means since, generally speaking, they serve mediocre and limited intentions, which, at their core, are foreign to Surrealism. It is impossible to abandon oneself to them—as in automatic writing—or, on the contrary, to reject them, thus delivering art back over to ideology. On the contrary, a limited confidence must be granted and must be regularly reexamined, depending on circumstances and the medium in question; a medium that has to be transformed with every usage, precisely in function of the end that is to be attained. This counts as the most

appropriate way to free up the force of an effective art, of engineering a chance for poetry in an unpoetic world.

To the extent that the photo constitutes a more 'vulgar,' mechanical and materialist tool, seemingly detached from the artistic aura and commodity fetishism, it distinguishes itself from painting and of literature—the 'noble arts'—which always run the risk of being co-opted as the pure means to an end in itself. Critique is double: the refusal of reducing Surrealism to a technique, to a method or to a means, but likewise the refusal of restoring the movement within the narrow borders of art. For the same reason, Nougé insists on marking the distance of the praxis of Surrealism with the works of children and the insane, works that are purportedly close to Surrealist experimentation. They are to be distinguished on two main grounds: Surrealism operates through a control of the means used which in turn are put in the service of an original, conscious, revolutionary project. Moreover, photography is a more malleable, strategic medium better attuned to the revolutionary spirit in that it offers the possibility of a collective and anonymous art. Suffice it to recall Nougé's words Breton cites in the 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism:' 'I should be grateful if those among us whose name begins to mean something, would erase it (ibid.: 79).'

The uses of the document and of the 'documentary' are so effective owing to their appeal to visual simplicity, to familiar images, not to mention 'clichés' and commonplaces, which mine and trap reality, and strike the public all the more forcefully since it unknowingly allowed itself to be attacked in its habits of seeing and thinking. This aspect has not been sufficiently stressed, although it is evident from the title of reviews: Bataille and Leiris's magazine *Documents* of 1929-1930, and the eponymous Belgian magazine, which was close to the Surrealists—it published a special issue in 1934 on 'Surrealist Interventions'—and ran from 1933 till 1938. The document functions as relay, as corrective of art. Strictly speaking, it is neither documentary poetry nor a poetic document. Rather, it approximates the way Atget speaks of his photos as 'documents' (Atget cited by Baqué, 1993: 399) or how Walter Benjamin, in his article on Surrealism, invokes *Une saison en enfer* as 'the first document' of Surrealism (Benjamin, 2000: 114). These are agentive documents, animated and charged by the Surrealist revolution. The transgressive use of the document and of the documentary thus allows for a reduplication of the deterritorialization of art and of Surrealism through the means of photography.

Fig. 3 Paul Nougé, *The Reader*, from the *Subversion of Images* series, 1929/1930, photographic print by Marc Trivier. © Bruxelles, *Archives & Musée de la Littérature* © SOFAM.

Moreover, it reinforces the equation between ends and means at the core of the strategy of piracy and active parasitizing of Nougé and his accomplices.

Let us now focus on these two photos: *The Reader* [Le lecteur] (fig.3) and *Woman Frightened by Twine* [Femme effrayée par une ficelle] (fig.4). The relation is exaggerated, exacerbated. In the second photo, the disproportion between the model's reaction—terror—the banality of the object—a piece of string—and the neutral, documentary realism of the shot constitute a test. In the notes accompanying this image, Nougé sets out to interrogate 'the new relationships a human being can entertain with an inanimate object (Nougé, 1982: 132).'[16] The photo simultaneously reappraises the place and the role, the familiarity of the objects that surround us, our (false) sense of security, and the neutral and natural character we accord to

Fig. 4 Paul Nougé,
*Woman Frightened
by Twine*, from the
Subversion of Images
series, 1929/1930,
photographic print
by Marc Trivier. ©
Bruxelles, *Archives &
Musée de la Littérature*
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our everyday encounters. Walter Benjamin spoke in this respect of a 'determined look' that is 'politically educated (Benjamin, 2000: 312),' stripping places and objects of their 'banal obviousness (Benjamin, 1999: 211).' This estranged gaze highlights the fact that we live in a manufactured world, a counterfeit world even, of which the document and the documentary would be the paradoxical double. This world, as it were doubly distorted—through its claim to naturalness and the indeterminate or naturalist gaze which lends it its credence, thus overdetermining this 'natural' character—must be rebuilt wholesale, de-structured and reassembled on the foundation of a higher, freer and richer ordering.

However, these photos also make clear the sought-after goal of the Surrealists vis-à-vis the audience, as well as the double pitfall to be avoided. It is a question

of compromising oneself and of compromising the audience, of capturing the latter's attention and of enthralling the public, of turning it into an accomplice or, in the worst case, an enemy, forcing the viewer to abandon his or her aloofness. However, this has to be effected without an aggrandizement of means, lyric or artistic, which always runs the risk of neutralizing all intervention by relegating it 'to the very special and particularly closed domain of aesthetic contemplation (Nougé, 1980: 93).'[17] On the contrary, the intended disruption is closely linked to the economy of the means used; it happens through the insidious difference, the slight interval between what we had anticipated and what actually takes place. In short, these photos provide a strategic counterpoint to the 'sliced eye': the effect is brought home through objects that are as trivial, through techniques that are as banal as they are disruptive.

Towards a Minor Surrealism

Subversion of Images radicalizes Guattari and Deleuze's conception of being a stranger within one's own language. More than merely a foreigner, Nougé desires to make Surrealism the worm in the fruit, a parasite, living at the expense of art, hollowing it out, gnawing at it to the point of making it burst. According to Benjamin, the work of Surrealism engaged in an operation in which 'the sphere of poetry was exploded from within by…pushing the "poetic life" to the utmost limits of possibility (Benjamin, 1999: 208).' A biologist by training, Nougé inverts the metaphor of parasitism and mobilizes it against the spirit of seriousness and hygiene of society. Thus, his *Educational Postcard,* [Carte postale éducative], reproduced in the special issue of *Variétés* entitled 'Surrealism in 1929,' resumes the organic work carried out in *Subversion of Images*.

The center is occupied by a drawing of a dust mite, inside of which appears a photo of what could well be Russian revolutionaries, while around the image information is provided about the animal: passing on 'venomous liquid,' it can be found 'in the countryside, when vegetation begins to rot; in certain fabrics, in certain decomposed books (*Variétés*, 1984: 48).'[18] Here we have the metaphor of a weakened art, of a putrefying society and the part played by Surrealism at the heart of it all. It is also a dialectical inversion of the 'guest' organism that is supposedly healthy, and the one living off it. Consequently, the photograph, as 'document' of reality, as 'objective representation' of the world, endows the

discrepancies and accidents of representation with greater amplitude, thereby constituting a milieu especially suited to parasitism: it is a parasitism that stretches out and propagates beyond reality and the photographic medium, even going beyond Surrealism itself. Nougé duplicates the transgression, the parasitism of photography by that of Surrealism, turning both into something different altogether, going against our expectations, thereby reorienting all energies, all series of intersections and tension: automatism/conscious action; the marvelous/banality; politics/poetry; minor/major. In this way, *Subversion of Images* tries to draw out a plane of consistency between means and end, between an 'art as a means,' a middle-brow art and a minor Surrealism, between the photographic medium and the project of an unsettling poetry. It is a kind of encoded manifesto, pirating Surrealist poles, short-circuiting the birth of a 'Surrealist art' and sabotaging any becoming-major, in order to restore Surrealism to its simplest expression, in its intent to 'change life' and 'transform the world.'

Notes

[1] Generally speaking, with respect to the history of Belgian Surrealism and its relation with photography, I am basing my account on Xavier Canonne's *Le surréalisme en Belgique, 1924-*2000 (Brussels: Fonds Mercator, 2007).

[2] Original quote: 'l'efficacité poétique par les moyens de la photographie'. [All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated. Note of the translator.]

[3] I would like to thank the Archives et Musée de la Littérature and Marc Trivier for authorizing the reproduction of the images from the *Subversion of Images* series.

[4] Each number between brackets refers to a sequence of *La chambre aux miroirs*.

[5] Original quote: 'Il eût suffi d'un mot, d'un seul mot qui n'a pas été dit. Et jamais, jamais je ne saurai quels seins voilait le petit soutien-gorge prêt à se défaire, quel ventre, quelles hanches, quelle chevelure cachait le court pantalon opaque et lâche (…). 'Je ne me pardonnerai jamais cette seconde de faiblesse.'

[6] Original quote :'Elle doit crier si elle jouit, crier des injures; ou s'enfermer dans un silence noir.'

[7] Original quotes: 'murs de toile des baraques foraines, [aux] enseignes des boutiques de faubourg,' 'leur unique souci de créer des images aussi évidentes et aussi chargées de sens qu'il est possible, et cela indépendamment de toute préoccupation esthétique touchant la beauté et l'originalité.'

[8] Incidentally, the Belgian surrealists had distorted a grammar handbook by Clarisse Juranville. – Original quotes: 'l'illusoire réalité objective de la photographie,' 'des ouvrages scolaires illustrés de la fin du XIXe siècle.'

[9] Cf. my article, 'A cinema in the service of revolution,' *ADEN*, 10 (October 2011): 163-183.

[10] Original quote:'Voir est un acte.'

[11] For more on this subject, see Alain Brossat's analogous and contemporaneous reflections in his essay: 'Nous sommes tous des voleurs de poules roumains!,' *Chimères*, 73 (Spring 2010), available at: http://www.revue-chimeres.fr/drupal_chimeres/?q=node/358 [consulted September 20, 2010].

[12] Original quote: 'scènes confortables:'Mais oui, il y a aussi un confort du cataclysme, un confort de la terreur, très à la mode aujourd'hui (…) Après cela, tout s'arrête.'

[13] Original quote: 'La musique, livrée à elle-même, ne tarde pas à mal tourner. Jeu gratuit, elle lasse les joueurs, elle ne sert plus rien,—elle ne sert plus à rien.'
Il faut donc, à tout prix, lui découvrir ou lui inventer une fin extérieure à elle-même, qui la domine, l'oriente et la justifie.'

[14] Original quote: 'n'est en somme qu'une arme équivoque maniée par une classe qui refuse de mourir.'

[15] Original quote: 'leur confère une égale et suffisante dignité.'

[16] Original quote: 'rapports nouveaux que peut entretenir un être humain avec un objet inanimé.'

[17] Original quote: 'dans le domaine très spécial et particulièrement fermé de la contemplation esthétique.'

[18] Original quote: 'un liquide venimeux,' 'dans les campagnes, si la végétation commence de pourrir; dans quelques toiles, dans certains livres decomposes.'

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8 Conceptual Art and Surrealism: an Exceptional, Belgian Liaison

Liesbeth Decan

At first sight, Conceptual art and Surrealism appear to be two worlds that are miles apart from one another. However, especially in their use of the photographic medium, both movements have some general characteristics in common. For example, they share a disregard for conventional notions of authorship and individual artistic expression as adopted by modern art photography, where artistic skill is a defining criterion. Moreover, since technical skill is not necessarily required to create photographic images, Surrealists as well as Conceptual artists considered the easily accessible medium of photography as an ideal tool to express their ideas. A case in point is the statement by the Czech Surrealist Karel Teige in 1922: 'Photography is lovely just because it isn't art (Bajac et al., 2009: 18).' In a related vein, both Surrealists and Conceptual artists used photography's quality of reproduction to publish and distribute their (photographic) work in journals, counter to the idea of the unique art object. In Surrealism as in Conceptual art, photography was also an important medium due to its strong ties with reality. Surrealists used photographs in order to demonstrate the surreal in the real, while Conceptual artists introduced—mainly by means of photography—the banal,

daily life into art. Alongside the factor of deskilling, and the application of photography because of its reality-bound features and reproducibility, the combined use of image and text is a common ground between Conceptual art and Surrealism—in particular, the strongly linguistic and literary interpreted Surrealism of the Brussels group pioneered by Paul Nougé and René Magritte.

In this paper I will present a corpus of works that surpass the general parallels sketched above and attest to a profound relationship between Conceptual art and Surrealism—more precisely, the Surrealism of the Brussels group. This involves the photographic work of a few Belgian artists, created in the 1960s and 1970s. For, an analysis of their oeuvres shows that—next to characteristics that connect them with the 'Conceptual canon'—deliberately or not, they also attest to a Surrealist inheritance. Accordingly, the use of photography by Belgian Conceptual artists can be labeled as 'minor' on two levels. It is primarily minor in comparison with major art photography. Here, the photographic work of the Belgian Conceptual artists aligns with the use of photography within Conceptual art and Surrealism in general, which—as described above—differs from art photography especially through the notion of deskilling. On a second level, however, the work of Belgian Conceptual artists relates to the Anglo-American Conceptual art as minor to major. As the examples in this paper will show, through its liaison with Brussels Surrealism, the photoconceptual work of Belgian artists appears as a variant to the Conceptual canon, which is composed of work by mainly Anglo-American artists.

Marcel Broodthaers: Intermediary and Pioneer

One of the pioneers of Conceptual art in Belgium is Marcel Broodthaers (1924-1976). Not only is he one of the few Belgian artists who received international recognition during the 1970s but also his role in this study of Conceptual art as a form of 'post-Surrealism' is crucial since he is the intermediary between the realm of Surrealism (especially the work of René Magritte) and Conceptual art adopted by the following generation. Broodthaers frequented the Brussels Surrealist circles as a poet and he participated in the first post-war meeting of the Surrealists in Brussels in 1945. It was within this context that Broodthaers met Paul Nougé and René Magritte for the first time—encounters that would later be of great importance in the development of his artistic oeuvre. In 1957 Broodthaers started to make

documentary photographs, encouraged by Julien Coulommier. In 1964 he decided to become an artist.

In 1972—in one of the two exhibition catalogs of his *Museum of Modern Art. Department of Eagles. Section of Figures: The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present* [Musée d'Art Moderne. Département des Aigles. Section des Figures: Der Adler vom Oligozän bis heute] at the Städtische Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf—Broodthaers revealed his methodology as based on the legacy of Magritte, on the one hand, and Marcel Duchamp, on the other. However, his work from his debut until this time was already marked by an influence of Surrealism, the movement to which both Magritte and Duchamp are related.

Broodthaers' artistic use of photography, which is of interest here, started in 1965 by filling glass jars with photographed mouths, eyes and faces cut from magazines and integrating these in installations. His use of the magazine cut-outs brings to mind Pop art collages, particularly those images that show the obvious smile of actress and Pop idol Marilyn Monroe. Furthermore, Broodthaers' integration of real objects, such as the glass jars or mussels and eggshells, into his installations recalls the artistic practice of the Nouveaux Réalistes. Thus, Broodthaers appropriated some of the expressive and material means evident in Pop art and Nouveau Réalisme. However, his interest in these movements is ambiguous. For example, in 1965 he stated that it was his exposure to Pop art, especially the work of George Segal, which he saw at Galerie Sonnabend in Paris in 1963, that encouraged him to make his own art works. Whereas in 1963, in his article '*Gare au défi!* Pop Art, Jim Dine and the Influence of René Magritte,' he had critically described Pop art and Nouveau Réalisme as 'figurative art, perhaps, but so stripped down that it appears to fall into a special void (Broodthaers, 1963),' and considered Segal's figures as 'ordinary moldings of human beings (Broodthaers, 1963).'

Importantly, in the '*Gare au défi!*' article Broodthaers also mentioned René Magritte as 'one of our greatest artists (...) a Belgian who without moving from our small territory, has certainly influenced and determined this artistic trend [Pop art] that flourishes in New York (Broodthaers, 1963).' Thus, as early as 1963, he acknowledged the importance of Magritte's work, especially—as would turn out later in his oeuvre—for the interaction between words and images. After 1967, words—Broodthaers' beloved tool from the period when he worked as a poet—would appear as structural elements in his artworks (Gildemyn, 1979: 34).

Alongside the Pop art reference, the glass jar installations with cut-out mouths and eyes also recall some Surrealist works. The motif of the isolated body part frequently occurs in Surrealist painting and photography, as in the work of Max Ernst, René Magritte, Salvador Dalí, Man Ray, Jacques-André Boiffard, Claude Cahun, Roger Parry, Hans Bellmer and Dora Maar. In their work, a body part in close-up is often depicted as a *pars pro toto* that refers to the whole body. The sharp focus on one particular part of the body leads to a condensation and displacement of meaning, which generates a surprising, even uncanny effect (Krauss, 1985: 19).

Similar to his association with Pop art and Nouveau Réalisme, Broodthaers' relationship to Surrealism is ambivalent. His Surrealist formation as a poet in the Brussels avant-garde circles of the 1940s was invaluable for his later development as a visual artist. As a member of the Brussels Surrealist group, he was opposed to the ideas of André Breton, the key figure of the Parisian Surrealist group, who proclaimed, for example, the method of the automatic writing. In his text from 1974, 'Ten Thousand Francs Reward,' which was based on an interview conducted by Irmeline Lebeer, Broodthaers firmly denied that he had anything to do with Breton's idea of the mind being able to neutralize opposites such as 'life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low,' which Breton had formulated in his *Second Surrealist Manifest* from 1930 (Broodthaers, 1991: 249).

As a visual artist, then, Broodthaers would also turn his back on certain concepts of the Brussels Surrealist group. For example, contrary to the Surrealist, typically avant-garde, aversion to the art institute, Broodthaers developed an institutional critique that was based on the idea that an artist is never completely freed from an involvement with the art institute. His creation of the *Museum of Modern Art. Department of Eagles* clearly attests to this idea, as did his first statement as an artist, the famous: 'I, too, wondered if I couldn't sell something and succeed in life (…) (Buchloh, 1987: 71-72).' From the very beginning of his career as an artist, Broodthaers made explicit the essential cooperation between artist and art dealer or curator. From this point of view, Broodthaers found a companion in Magritte, who towards the end of his artistic career was accused by Marcel Mariën, among others, as having betrayed the Surrealist ideals. A notorious incident dates from 1962 when Mariën, in disagreement with Magritte's commercialization, circulated the false announcement of *Big Reductions* [La Grande Baisse] fraudulently signed by Magritte. Remarkably, the *Big Reductions* pamphlet predates Broodthaers'

statement 'I, too, wondered if I couldn't sell something (...)' by only two years. In accordance with Broodthaers' wish to distance himself from Surrealism, but at the same time to take Magritte as an example, in an interview with Jean-Michel Vlaeminckx in 1965, Broodthaers remarked that Magritte was never really a member of the Surrealist group, that he stayed in the margins (Vlaeminckx, 1965). In 1967, in his 'Imaginary Interview with René Magritte,' Broodthaers published the famous photograph, taken by his wife Maria Gilissen, of Magritte handing his bowler hat to him. This image symbolizes the changed position of Broodthaers, who, in the 1940s and 1950s, was associated with the Brussels Surrealist movement and especially Revolutionary Surrealism but, when he became a visual artist in the 1960s, turned his back on Surrealism and—after a debut in Pop art—followed Magritte's footsteps.

In 1967 Broodthaers started to make use of photography in a new way, namely in his photographic tableaux. These 'photographic paintings' consist of photographic images printed on photosensitive canvas. Some of them represent his earlier works such as *Mussels* (1967), which includes a photographic print of one of his mussel pots. Other works include the reproduction of an object, such as a beaker filled with a crumpled piece of paper with text on it, which is placed on a little shelf directly in front of the picture of the object.

In spite of a few technical similarities with Pop and Nouveau Réalisme, like the affixing of objects to a canvas, Broodthaers distanced himself from these movements by stressing his Magrittian focus on the relationship between an object, an image of that object, and language. In contrast with, for example, the use of real objects in Pop art and Nouveau Réalisme, Broodthaers' specific aim was to unravel the relation between the object, its image, and its name (Broodthaers, 1968).

The strategy of combining an object, an image and words that approximately express the same meaning is found in Joseph Kosuth's tripartite Proto-Investigations, such as *One and Three Chairs* (1965). The structure of Broodthaers' work with the glass jar and Kosuth's works is very similar: both comprise an object, a photographic reproduction of the object, and a text related to the object, all of which lead to cross-references. In contrast with the works by Kosuth, in which the meanings of the three presented elements converge, the 'ensemble' of Broodthaers is more difficult to decipher. For example, since the alphabet on the right of Broodthaers' composition is incomplete—the letters B, C, and S to Z are missing—and

the text crumpled in the glass jar is not legible, 'holes' occur in the reading of the work. The destabilization of meaning is a key feature of Broodthaers' oeuvre and underscores the impossibility of depicting and fully understanding reality (Buchloh, 1987: 75, 78-80; Haidu, 2010: 185).

It should also be noted that it is unlikely that Broodthaers knew Kosuth's work before 1969, the year in which various exhibitions—including *Konzeption-Con-ception* in Leverkusen, *Prospect 69* in Düsseldorf, *When Attitudes become Form* in Bern, Krefeld and London, and *Op losse schroeven* in Amsterdam—confronted the European public for the first time with Conceptual art as the leading avant-garde movement and its many American contributors. Thus, it seems that rather than being influenced by Conceptual art, Broodthaers' work coincided with the flourishing of Conceptual art. As Marie-Pascale Gildemyn has argued, it was this new wave in the art world, which allowed Broodthaers to use text and writing in combination with (often photographic) images without being regarded as a writer any more (Gildemyn, 1985: 24). In fact, the photographic tableaux in which word, image and object are combined best illustrate Broodthaers' processing of Magritte's legacy and, through this, his entrance into the realm of Conceptual art.[1]

The 'Surrealist Conceptualism' of Jacques Louis Nyst and Jacques Lizène

In the 1970s the Surrealist inheritance—passed on and mediated by Brood-thaers—seems particularly evident in the work of some members of the artists' group Cercle d'Art Prospectif (hereafter CAP), which was founded in 1972 by the artist Jacques Lennep (b. 1941). In his manifesto from 1973, Lennep devel-oped the notion of 'relational art' as the feature of the artistic research CAP was occupied with (Lennep, 1973). The manner in which this concept can be found in the individual oeuvres differs from artist to artist but, in general, the 'rela-tional art' they intended can be defined as an art characterized by an interaction between different media (text, photo, object) on the one hand, and a narrative and sociological aspect (examining the relationship between artist and reality/society) on the other (Lennep, 1974: 18; van Lennep, 2002: 24). Worth men-tioning too is that Jacques Lennep is the pseudonym for Jacques van Lennep, who—as an art historian—was employed at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts

of Belgium and that in this function he focused on the study of the so-called 'alchemic art' and...Surrealism.

Jacques Louis Nyst (1942-1996) was one of the prominent members of CAP. Nyst debuted as an artist in the field of painting in the mid-1960s. During his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Madrid and Liège, between 1962 and 1967, he buried himself in the study of Surrealism and especially in the work of René Magritte, to whom he paid a visit in 1964. In a letter to the poet André Bosmans, Magritte gave an account of Nyst's visit, saying that he liked Nyst's ideas about the dream that does not have to be understood as an 'evasion (Blavier, 1979: 457)'. In an interview with Léopold Plomteux, Nyst stated that he was interested in the work of Magritte because of his capacity to translate a whole mental world into an image (Renwart, 2002: 170). This Surrealist orientation is clearly visible in the work Nyst created during the mid-1960s. At that time the artist mostly made colorful, figurative canvas or panel paintings with imaginary, dreamlike scenes that included typical Surrealist/Magrittian motifs, such as the mirror or the doubling of figures.

After 1971 Nyst devoted himself—by means of a multimedia approach—to the analysis of the process of constructing and perceiving an image (Merland, 2002: 82). In his so-called *Readings of Photographs* [Lectures de photographies], he combined a photograph with a graphic or pictorial interpretation of the image. Some of these 'pictorial interpretations' consist of a repetition of a motif throughout the picture plane, as seen in *The Idea of Color (Leafage)* [L'idée de la couleur (feuillage)] from 1973 (pl.6). This two-fold image is part of the series *The Idea of Color* [L'idée de la couleur], in which each time a single motif—in this case a leafed twig—has been extracted from the photographic image and copied in color within a framed white square. The extracted motif is juxtaposed with the photograph. Through this process of indirectly adding color to the black-and-white picture, Nyst aimed to complete the reading of the photo consequently (and indirectly) by providing a gateway to the real. The photograph thereby acts as an intermediary between reality, the painted image, and the viewer during the process of reading. The same approach is used in works in which a motif from a photograph is not repeated but 'extended.' For instance, in *The Fork* [La Fourche] from 1974 the handle of a fork is cut off by the photographic frame but is completed by the application of yellow paint in a framed white square directly underneath the photograph (pl.7).

The objects that define the minimalist works of Nyst recall certain Surrealist works—not that surprising given the artist's background. For example, the hanging cloth in *The Fork* bears resemblance to the shirts in the picture *Linen and Bell* [Linges et cloche] from Paul Nougé's series *Subversion of Images* (1929-1930)—the 'imag-ination' of the theory of the 'disturbing objects' [objets bouleversants] that Nougé formulated based on the pictorial work of Magritte (Nougé, 1956: 239-241). Alternatively, it recalls the linen in some photographs by Henri Cartier-Bresson from the 1930s including *Dear Breton, This Linen, Is This Of Your Business?* [Cher Breton, ce linge fait-il votre affaire?] (ca. 1933).

The series *The Idea of Color* is part of Nyst's artist's book entitled *We Are Not Astronauts* [Nous ne sommes pas des cybernautes] and published in 1973. The book is composed of ten 'readings' [lectures], all of which begin with a photographic image that is completed by a drawing (as in the examples discussed above) or by other photographs. On the one hand, Nyst's creation of artist's books aligns with a frequently occurring practice within Conceptual art. On the other, his books often reveal a resemblance to the genre of the *photo-roman* in which the narrative (produced by word and image) is of crucial importance. This is certainly the case in Nyst's *The Paper Umbrella and the Principle of 'Non-Reality'* [L'ombrelle en papier et le principe de non-réalité], published by Yellow Now in 1976 (fig.1). In this book, a number of 'readings of photographs'—involving double images with photographic and graphic parts—is supplemented with a text that tells the story of a mini paper umbrella that embodies human characteristics. The text helps to revive the inherently static photographs, just as the minimalist drawings add color to the image or indicate a movement in the image. This idea of the animated object, which occurs often in Nyst's oeuvre, is another reference to Surrealism. Think, for example, of the mysterious object Marthe Nougé is pointing at in *Woman Frightened by twine* [Femme effrayée par une ficelle], part of Nougé's *Subversion of Images* (1929-1930), the floating shoe in Magritte's portrait of *Camille Goemans Writing, Paris* [Camille Goemans écrivant dans son atelier à Paris] (1928), the pair of shoes that seems to climb the stairs in Marcel Mariën's *The Spirit of the Staircase* [L'esprit de l'escalier] (ca. 1952), or the iron, taken out on a leash, in a photograph from Roger Livet's *A Regrettable Matter* [Une regrettable affaire] (ca. 1947). The strategy of taking an object—in this case a paper umbrella—out of its regular context (on top of an ice cream, for example) and putting it into a new setting (in a room, on a parquet

floor) completely aligns with Nougé's description of how 'disturbing objects' are created in Magritte's images (Nougé, 1956: 239-241). This strategy can also be described as a process of de- and reterritorialization, one of the key concepts of minor photography (Bleyen, 2010: 15; Bleyen and Van Gelder, 2011: 119).

A peculiar case is that of the artist Jacques Lizène (b. 1946), another CAP member. Lizène used the medium of photography to supply either a commentary on, or subversion of, traditional genres such as portraiture, still life, or street photography. He realized this through the notion of the mediocre, an approach that is in line with contemporary photoconceptual art as analyzed by Jeff Wall in his classic essay, 'Marks of Indifference: Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art' (1995). Lizène, however, went further than his contemporaries. Not only is his work—certainly his photographic work—characterized by a certain 'deskilling' and 'visual banality,' to use Wall's terms, he also identified himself as the ultimate mediocre artist. In 1970 he defined himself as the 'Minor, late mid-twentieth-century Master of Liège, Artist of the Mediocre and Unimportant' [Petit Maître liégeois de la seconde moitié du XXème siècle, artiste de la médiocrité et de la sans importance]. In essence, Lizène used mediocrity as a means to claim the artistic value of an object or an idea that is not typically considered as praiseworthy. With this strategy of mediocrity—a deliberate refusal to make 'high art'—Lizène, in fact, continued the Surrealist
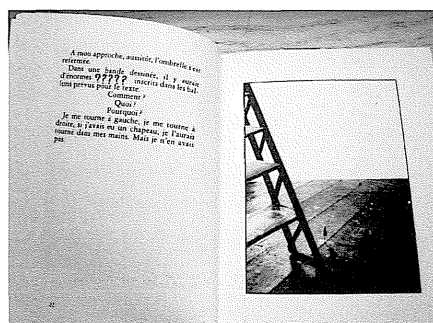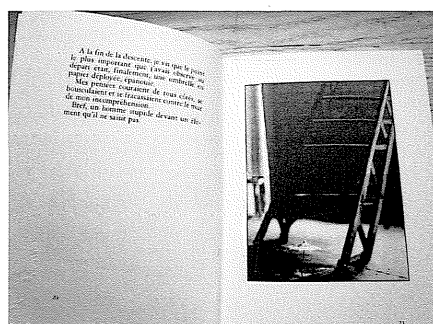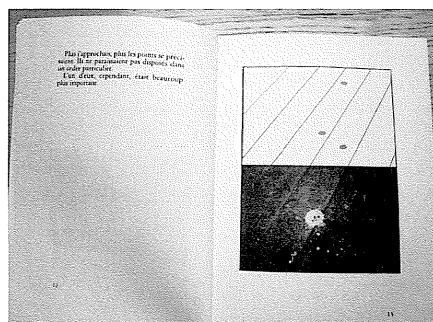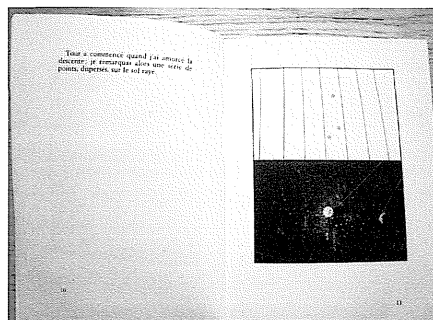
Fig. 1 Jacques Louis Nyst, *The Paper Umbrella and the Principle of 'Non-Reality'* (Editions Yellow Now, 1976): 10-11, 12-13, 20-21, 22-23. © Jacques Louis Nyst.

Fig. 2 Jacques Lizène, *The Minor Master from Liège Pressing his Nose against the Surface of the Photograph (The Perceived and the Not-Perceived)*, 1972-73, black-and-white photograph. © Jacques Lizène (Courtesy: Galerie Nadja Vilenne, Liège).

methodology that had been most 'purely' adopted by Marcel Mariën (Bleyen, 2010).

In 1972 and 1973 Jacques Lizène created a series of photographic works entitled *The Perceived and the Not-Perceived* [Le Perçu et le Non-Perçu] in which the photographic mechanism is shown, analyzed, and questioned in a light, humorous way. The series starts with a self-portrait entitled *The Minor Master from Liège Pressing his Nose against the Surface of the Photograph* [Petit Maître liégeois s'écrasant le bout du nez sur la surface de la photographie] (fig.2). In 'The Quick and Incomplete Autobiography, by Lizène Himself' (published in 1990 in his first catalogue raisonné), the artist asserted that 'the surface of the photo was actually a window' and thus, he qualified the image as 'a mediocre joke (Lizène, 1990: 31).' This silly statement, nevertheless, makes the viewer conscious of the camera lens as a screen that separates the photograph from reality. Lizène's remark also reminds the viewer of the fact that what is shown is not reality but an (indexical) image of reality.

Most of the other works that are part of the series *The Perceived and the Not-Perceived* were based upon the idea of reproducibility, a fundamental characteristic of the photographic medium. In each work a series of photographs—with exactly or nearly the same images—is combined with a caption suggesting that the images differ but in a way that is 'unperceivable.' One of the works included in the series is: *In the second photo the black sock worn on the subject's right foot is worn on the subject's left foot in the first photo, whereas in the third photo the subject wears two completely different socks* [Sur la deuxième photographie, la chaussette noire portée au pied droit par le personnage est portée par celui-ci au pied gauche sur la première photographie tandis que sur la troisième photographie le personnage porte deux chaussettes différentes] (fig.3).

In this series the photographs alone cannot make the meaning of the artwork clear; words are required, therefore, in order to communicate the content that the artist intended. The combination of a series of images and a text in the form of a caption is a strategy that is often used within the discourse of Conceptual art. Take, for example, John Baldessari's *The Back of All the Trucks Passed While Driving from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara, California, Sunday 20 January 1963*, which consists of pictures of, indeed, the back of trucks. The caption of this work (drily) describes what is seen in the pictures. By contrast, Lizène's works that form the series *The Perceived and the Not-Perceived* challenge the relation between what is read and what is seen. This approach recalls the subverted image-text-relation found in the work of René Magritte, such as *The Treachery of Images* [La Trahison des Images] (1929). In addition, Lizène affirmed in an interview his appreciation for Magritte and especially 'his particularly modern way of interrogating the image (Gielen, 2003: 23).'

In some works that preceded the series *The Perceived and the Not-Perceived* the titles of the photos describe the absurd performances represented in the pictures. The 'picture frame' is the photographic feature Lizène focused on most in these works. For instance, *Forcing the Body to Fit Inside the Photo Frame* [Contraindre le corps à s'inscrire dans le cadre de la photo] shows a mosaic of thirty self-portraits that gradually picture the change from a standing to a kneeling position (fig.4). In each image, the camera zoomed closer and closer to the subject, forcing him to bend down increasingly until
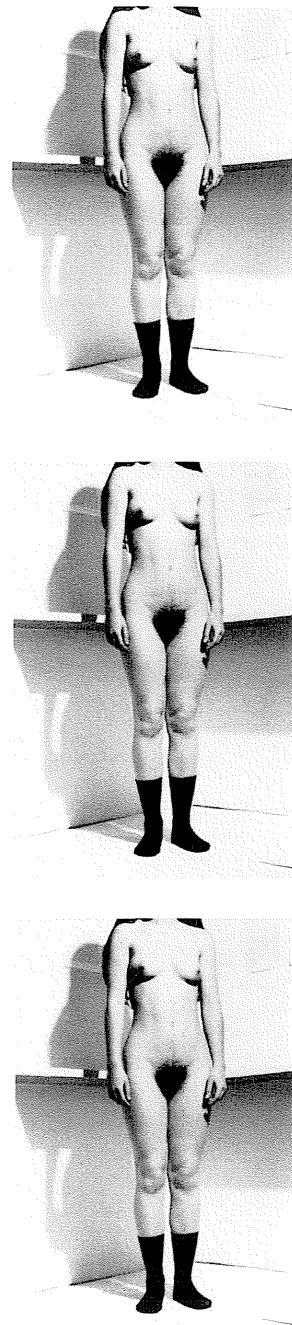
Fig. 3 Jacques Lizène, *In the second photo the black sock worn on the subject's right foot is worn on the subject's left foot in the first photo, whereas in the third photo the subject wears two completely different socks (The Perceived and the Not-Perceived)*, 1973, 3 black-and-white photographs. © Jacques Lizène (Courtesy: Galerie Nadja Vilenne, Liège).

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he appears totally contained by the framing of the camera. Other related examples from 1971 include: *Minor Master from Liège Having Attached His Tie to the Photo Frame* [Petit Maître liégeois ayant accroché sa cravate au cadre de la photo], showing a full portrait of the artist whose tie indeed seems to be attached to the right upper corner of the photograph; *Minor Master from Liège Entering the Frame of a Photo* [Petit Maître liégeois s'introduisant dans le cadre d'une photo] in which the artist pops up in the right side of the picture merely showing the upper part of his body; *Minor Master from Liège Joyously Entering the Frame of a Photo* [Petit Maître liégeois s'introduisant joyeusement dans le cadre d'une photo], which consists of a sequence of two photographs showing the artist entering the frame of the picture while smiling; *Minor Master from Liège Hesitating Before Entering the Frame of One Photo or the Other* [Petit Maître liégeois hésitant à entrer dans le cadre de l'une ou de l'autre photo], which consists of two photographs, the frames of which cut the portrait of the artist in half.

A common element of this group of works is the performance aspect, which is typically executed by the artist himself. Lizène's performances link his work to the 'Conceptual canon.' Taking Jeff Wall's analysis in his essay, 'Marks of Indifference,' again as a point of reference, these performances can be connected to the work of Bruce Nauman. According to Wall, the performative qualities of Nauman's work 'brought photography into a new relationship with the problematic of the staged, or posed, picture (Wall, 1995: 253).' Furthermore, Wall described Nauman's performances as a manifestation of the 'subjectivization of reportage' within the realm of photoconceptualism (ibid.). In his view, Nauman's studio photographs, such as *Failing to Levitate in the Studio* (1966) or *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* (1966-67/70), changed the terms of classical, studio photography into a mode that was no longer isolated from reportage. Nauman realized this by working within the experimental framework of performance art, executing 'a self-conscious, self-centered "play" (ibid.: 254).'

Although Lizène's photographs were not realized in the studio (but certainly could have been), his work corresponds to this analysis. Lizène is also the subject of a 'self-centered play' that uses the strategies of reportage photography in a humorous, inane way. Lizène's approaches are even more enlarged than in the case of Nauman since the banality of Lizène's scenes is reduced to new levels. Lizène's works differ from the Conceptual canon in the fact that he uses actions in order to put himself into perspective, thereby rendering his work with a distinctly absurd,
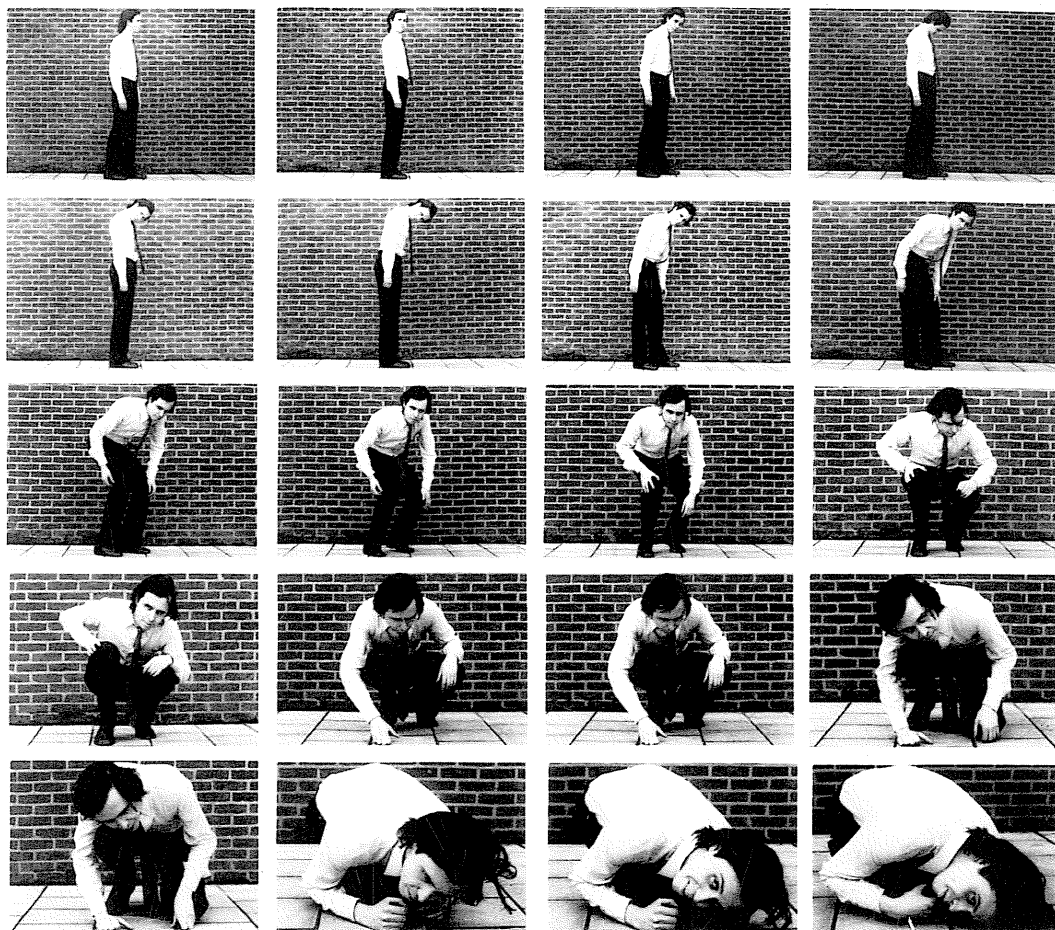
humorous undertone. As a matter of fact, Lizène remarked '[that] on August 28, 1990, he realized he was one of the inventors of the "comic conceptualism" of the early 1970s (Lizène, 1990: 43).' Due to their absurd, humorous character, some of Lizène's strategies are perfectly in line with, for example, those of Nougé in *Subversion of Images* or Magritte in his amateur snapshots. As a matter of fact, the strategy of staging, of constructing an image in a theatrical, well-reasoned way, is one of the key concepts of Nougé and the Brussels Surrealists. In addition, as discussed by Frédéric Thomas elsewhere in this volume, the montage and staging by Nougé in *Subversion of Images* is also derived from the documentary photographic style; he used the documentary style in order to generate—through small

Fig. 4 Jacques Lizène, *Forcing the Body to Fit Inside the Photo Frame*, 1971, 20 black-and-white photographs. © Jacques Lizène (Courtesy: Galerie Nadja Vilenne, Liège).

interventions—the greatest disturbing effect possible. This grafting onto reportage or documentary photography could also be denoted as a process of deterritorialization and thus, as a characteristic of minor photography.

Surrealist Quotations by Leo Copers and Philippe Van Snick

Another phenomenon in certain oeuvres of Belgian Conceptual artists is the appearance of literal quotations from Surrealist works and, remarkably, many are taken from the work of Magritte. For example, in 1971-1972 Leo Copers (b. 1947) made a photographic remake of Magritte's *The Ladder of Fire* [L'échelle de feu] (1934) with the idea that—by means of a photographic image—he was able to make the surreal real (pl.8). For, in a recent interview he explained that 'today, photography is not [considered] anymore [as] a representation of reality, but at that time it was. What was depicted in a photograph, was considered as real; what was depicted in a painting, was not [considered as real] (Van Canneyt, 2010).' The title of Copers' work, *The Funeral of René Magritte* [De begrafenis van René Magritte], refers to the anecdote, which is written by Copers in a letter that accompanies the color slide and tells the history of the knotty journey that the artist together with two of his friends made to attend Magritte's funeral in August 1967.

Another literal Surrealist reference is found in the oeuvre of Philippe Van Snick (b. 1946). His work *Balcony* [Balkon] (1975; fig.5) shows a view of a balcony in a sequence of seven black-and-white slides; the photos are taken from inside the room. Beginning with the second image and continuing through the seventh slide, a polygon appears on the balcony. The monotony of the sequence is broken by the fact that each slide shows a differently shaped polygon. Moreover, the repetition of the photos is also disrupted by the incidental changes that occur in the background of the composition. For instance, the curtains that are seen through the window across the street are sometimes closed while at other times they are partially open, as if someone was peeping at the artist while he took the photographs. This example shows how Van Snick deliberately allowed chance to enter his work but above all it is an example of how the artist used the method of the photo series to explore the notion of time and evoke an experience of time and place—features that link him with the 'Conceptual canon,' where artists often applied photography in a way that went counter to the traditional (Modernist) view on photography as a medium that produces autonomous images that capture and freeze one

particular moment at one particular place (Decan, 2010: 132, 140). At the same time, however, the work has a reference to Surrealism, namely René Magritte's *Perspective II* (*Manet's Balcony*) [Perspective II (le balcon de Manet] (1950), which Van Snick indicates as the starting point for his series (Interview with Philippe Van Snick, Schaarbeek, June 12, 2009).

Both Copers' and Van Snick's overt reference to the work of Magritte is not only a token of appreciation for the Surrealist master's oeuvre but is in fact an application of Nougé's concept of 'rewriting' [réécriture]. Through this method of rewriting, of reworking pre-existing material, the Brussels Surrealist believed one can appeal to the knowledge and sharpness of the viewer, who is stimulated to rethink the already known.

Conceptual Photography and Surrealism: an Exceptional Belgian Liaison

The fact that, in Belgium, Surrealism is passed on directly to the Conceptual artists appears as a true particularity. Because of this 'continuation of Surrealism' we cannot really speak of 'Belgian Conceptual art' as a '*neo*-avant-garde' that—after a break with the early 20th-century avant-gardes and a few decades of dominance of formal abstract painting—picks up the thread (Foster, 1996). In Belgium, there has not been such a break. One explanation for the finding that René Magritte is especially quoted and paraphrased in the oeuvres discussed above is the fact that—contrary to, for example, André Breton in France—Magritte did not flee to the United States during World War II but continued working in Europe. Until his death in 1967 he was present in Brussels—*the* center of contemporary art in Belgium. In addition, the younger Marcel Mariën, who published a substantial part of the work of the Brussels Surrealists—especially Paul Nougé—in *Les Lèvres nues,* continued working in the Surrealist spirit until

Fig. 5 Philippe Van Snick, *Balcony*, 1975, 7 black-and-white slides. © Philippe Van Snick.

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his death in 1993. With Magritte as the pivot of the Brussels Surrealist group, the movement was still a lively presence in Belgium in the 1960s and thus functioned as a breeding ground and a touchstone for a new generation of artists. As the photographic work discussed above shows, these young artists, debuting and working in the 1960s and 1970s, united the (direct or indirect) Surrealist legacy with fundamentals of Conceptualism in order to create an ambitious contemporary art with a local embedment but also with international aspirations. The 'minor' quality of this body of work is situated in precisely this variation from the canon. It implies a 'deterritorialized' artistic activity: an artistic activity from the periphery that works creatively with the tendencies revealed in the canon, making use of local influences. In essence, revealing the 'minor' photoconceptual art of Belgian artists does justice to the complexity of art and of art movements, to how they appear differently in different places.

Notes

[1] For more examples of Brussels Surrealist/Magrittian references in the work of Broodthaers, see: Liesbeth Decan, *Conceptual, Surrealist, Pictorial: Photo-based Art in Belgium (1960s—early 1990s)*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, KULeuven, 2011.

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Systematic Confusion and the Total Discredit of the World of Reality: Surrealism and Photography in Japan of the 1930s

Jelena Stojković

> *We do not yet know what, or where, Surrealism is. Still less, perhaps, do we know what is Surrealism in Japan.*
>
> (Sas, 1999:01)

Surrealism and Japan: Exotic Flower in a Distant Land

Internationality was among the main characteristics of Surrealism and global perspectives were immanent to the movement from its inception (Breton and Rosemont, 1978: 83). Although Surrealism demonstrated flexibility towards different cultures it encountered around the world (Richardson, 2005: 73-74), internationalization was by no means arbitrary (Breton, 1974: 257), and remained true to Surrealism's goals, set out at no less but to transform reality (Matheson, 2006: 2)

and change life (Breton and Rosemont, 1978: 25) by liberating the mind from its constraints (Breton, 1974: 25).

Ever since its ideas were first introduced to the country in the late 1920s, Japan has occupied an important position within Surrealism's international framework. This was most notable with the *Kaigai chōgenjitsushugi sakuhin ten* [Exhibition of foreign Surrealist works] touring Japan in 1937 and the inclusion of Japanese authors within the 1938 *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* in Paris. Looking at the impact Surrealism had in Japan at the time, and especially throughout the 1930s, what becomes immediately clear is its scope. With a collection of primary sources related to that impact published between 1999 and 2001 (Wada: 1999-2001) encompassing the total of fifteen volumes, there is no doubt that the richness of this material is yet to become a subject of a comprehensive study.

A number of socio-political circumstances and a possibly problematic compatibility of Surrealism with the priorities of Japanese cultural policies, however, impelled the formation of a specific Surrealist network with its overall structure, quality and significance questioned even at the time.

In such a manner, writing on Surrealism in Japan in 1937 Fukuzawa Ichiro doubted the fertility of the local soil to the ideas of foreign origin asking whether 'Surrealism in Japan in the late 1930s was an exotic flower transplanted into a distant land, one cultivated in an enclosed garden by several artists who were besotted by European culture (Clark, 1997: 25-26).'

On the other hand, on the reception of the poems by the Japanese Surrealist Kitasono Katsue, Ezra Pound stated in the same year that they represented a 'new' Japan, 'Surrealism without the half-baked ignorance of the French young (Kodama, 1987: 40),' expressing an enthusiasm possibly unaware of all the difficulties the comprehension of their origin would entail. Ever since, there have been a variety of opinions expressed and critical positions taken in relation to the idiosyncrasies of Japanese Surrealism.

Therefore, it appears that although we are aware that Surrealism did have a prominent presence in Japan, we are still not entirely sure of all the forms of its manifestations. As a point of departure, the fact that there was no single group that could be even remotely considered 'Japanese' in the sense of its 'French' equivalent (Breton and Rosemont, 1978: 89) has to be stressed.

A number of key individuals, such as Nishiwaki Junzaburō, Takiguchi Shūzō or Yamanaka Tiroux contributed to shared projects, across a number of publications and, most significantly, in the organization of the 1937 exhibition. However, a number of disperse voices, single or collective, produced specific responses to Surrealism around the country, adding to the cacophony of interpretations, reactions, polemics and objections it initiated.

This resulted in an absence of a common ground that would enable collective action (Richardson, 2005: 2), another prominent feature of Surrealism (Breton and Rosemont, 1978: 29), but also transcended the closeness characterizing a singular group, or a singular operational force (Sas, 1999: 1).

The fact that there was no anchoring element or a single 'centre' to define the existence of Surrealism in Japan was by no means particular to this country within the Surrealism's international orbit, with the well-known examples including at least Belgium and England.[1] However, this reflected on a relationship that developed between this specific Surrealism and the related photographic practices, and was to determine how the photographic images surfacing as a result of the relationship were produced and disseminated.

Hence, the aim here is to question if the photographic practices relating to Surrealism in Japan, especially during the 1930s, could be better approached and understood if read through the notion of a minor literature and consequently viewed as a case of minor photography.

The notion of a minor literature, coined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, does not refer to a quantitative or qualitative measure (Deleuze, 1995: 173), nor is it opposed to its 'major' counterpart. Rather, it problematizes the power relations within which both the minor and the major are contextualized, assigning political agency to an individual within the processes of deterritorialization and collective assemblage, the concepts formulated throughout the work of Deleuze and Guattari (Stivale, 2005: 110-111).

This notion has already been extended to the analysis of theatre and cinema in order to refer to different forms of artistic experimentation aimed at collapsing the construction of power relations within language and systems of representation (ibid.: 117). Therefore, this paper is to challenge its potential for offering a better understanding of specific photographic practices, as produced in Japan during the 1930s in relation to Surrealism.

Surrealism and Photography Reframed

Photographic images created in relation to Surrealism in Japan could not reflect group activities of a single Surrealist formation, but they would not have been produced exclusively individually either.

Producing significant bodies of work, the 'masters' of Japanese photography, such as Yasui Nakaji or Yamamoto Kansuke, have often, together with artists such as Ei Kyū, been singled out as producing work driven by the concepts offered by Surrealism.[2] Their practices have mostly been regarded from the perspective of singularity and exception, since they worked without apparent links to each other.

Belonging to different photography clubs around the country, however, a significant number of these artists (Nakaji and Kansuke included) were actively responding to collective discussions, on varied topics including Surrealism, held at regular meetings within a variety of different participants, including poets and painters. Collaborations in between the clubs' members were taking place constantly, through the production of texts, images, publications and exhibitions.

For example, Avant-Garde Photography Association, formed in Tokyo in 1938, consisted of Nagata Isshu, Imai Shigeru and Abe Yoshifumi, all of whom were actively engaged in the production of photographic images in relation to Surrealism, although primarily considered painters. The club also included a theorist-poet Takiguchi Shūzō, considered to be a figure of central importance for the development of Surrealism in Japan as its founding member. Similarly, Avant-Garde Image Group, founded the same year in Osaka had among its members Hanawa Gingo and Terushichi Hirai, whose images became iconic of the specific relationship between Surrealism and Japanese photography.[3]

The group considered to have had the closest relationship to Surrealism, Nagoya Avant-Garde Club based in Nagoya, initiated in 1937, contained prolific individuals such as Sakata Minoru, a photographer and theorist active in formulating the essence of 'photo-surrealism' and the poet and translator Yamanaka Tiroux alongside painters-photographers Shimozato Yoshio and Tajima Tsugio.[4]

Establishing a single *modus operandi* for the clubs would pose an equal difficulty as in trying to map out all the variety of connections in between their members and the Surrealists in France and elsewhere. It is worth noting, however, that the translation of André Breton's *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* existed in Japanese

since 1930 (translated by Takiguchi Shūzō), that Yamanka Tiroux kept vivid correspondence with a number of French Surrealists (translating into Japanese works by Louis Aragon, Paul Éluard and Philippe Soupault, among others) and that a number of Japanese artists resident in Paris and closely linked to the Surrealist circles, such as Okamoto Taro or Leonard Fujita, would have catered to a constant flow of information into Japan.

However, if we presuppose that both surrealist activities and the role photography came to play within them were best expressed in Surrealist periodicals and associated reviews, *La Révolution surréaliste, Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution, Documents* or *Minotaure*, and within André Breton's own novels—*Nadja, Les Vases communicants* and *L'Amour Fou* (Ades, 1985: 155), a significant differentiation in the case of Japan becomes obvious. Namely, photography was not featured within the initial Japanese publications relating to Surrealism in the late 1920s and early 1930s. If there were any visual materials accompanying the early translations of Surrealist texts, poetry collections and theoretical writings about the meanings and significance of Surrealism, they would have mostly been based on drawings and illustrations.[5]

Rather, the photographic images produced as a result of what we have established to be group activities of a certain kind, would have been featured regularly within a number of monthly photography magazines. The magazines, such as *Koga, Camera Art* or *Asahi Camera* and most importantly *Photo Times*, functioned as the means of publication of the images, as well as the platform for the artists to get informed of the latest images produced in different clubs or by different individuals around the country and in order to connect and engage with each other. The best example of this practice is the Avant-garde photography symposium sponsored by the *Photo Times* magazine in June 1938, with a large number of prominent photographers of the time discussing a number of issues, including Surrealism (Takeba, 2001: 228-247).

Also, the images published in the magazines would often be accompanied by the writings of the artists themselves, which should also be considered a prominent distinction, taking into account the lack of systematic theoretical investigation of Surrealist photography elsewhere (Walker, 2002: 8). In Japan, the linking between the images and texts would have often been the making of a single author.

For example, Hanawa Gingo, writing for the April issue of *Photo Times* magazine in 1938 identifies two main ways Surrealism is manifested in photography, illustrating the text entitled 'Shashingani okeru chōgenjitsushugino hatten' [Developments of Surrealism in photographic image] with his own images: solarization, as a means of capturing Surrealist 'automatism' and montage, as a method enabling the depiction of 'dream worlds (Takeba, 2001: 165-171) (fig.1).'

Fig. 1 Hanawa Gingo, Developments of Surrealism in photographic image, Photo Times, April 1938. © Trustees of the British Museum.

In addition, these magazines regularly featured works by amateur photographers responding to Surrealism either as members of different clubs or individually. As in the example of Yamamoto Saburo's collage representation of a civilization in ruins inhabited solely by animals and phantasmagorical creatures published in *Photo Times* in March 1939, these would often directly quote Surrealism as the driving force behind what could be understood as the critique of the current state of affairs in the country (fig.2).

Finally, in certain cases, members of different photo clubs would also produce collective works directly or indirectly reflecting on the significance of Surrealism to their practice. The collective publications include the manifesto of the Fukuoka-based *Société Irf*, calling for a 'localized Surrealism,' and Shimozato Yoshio's 1941 album *Mesemu Zoku, Chōgenjitsushugi Shashinshu* [Surrealist photo album of Mesemb genus], alternatively named *Genus Mesemb. 20 Photographies Surréalistes*, displacing a series of images of cacti produced by himself, Sakata Minoru and the cacti enthusiasts within a fantastic narrative.
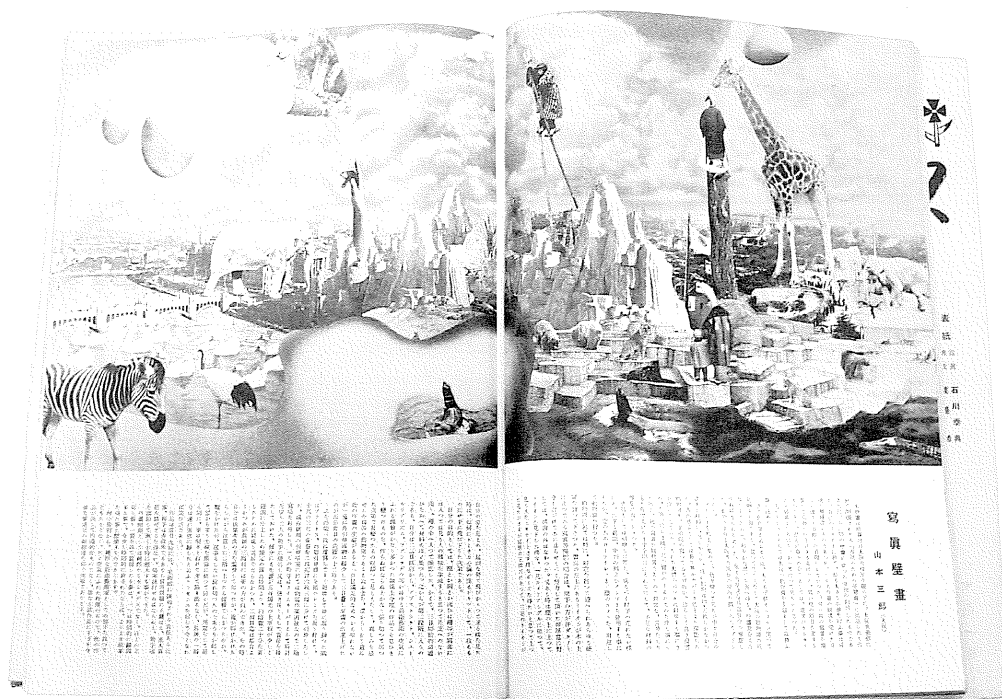
Surrealism and Photography in Japan: a Case of Minor Photography?

With this variety and abundance of examples in mind, it becomes apparent that the Surrealist photography in Japan existed mostly as part of what we could term the photographic scene of the time. Profoundly rich, it consisted of photo clubs, specialized periodicals and independent photographic volumes. Within this specific frame, Surrealist photography retained constant visibility until the government imposed a strict control of the publishing industry in 1941.

A significant number of authors who expressed their views and opinions on Surrealist photography on a number of occasions and via different practices came from what could be considered as the intellectual and artistic milieu directly linked to Surrealism. Examples would include Ei Kyū, most notably in his production of a

series of 'rayographs' in 1936 [Photo Dessin] but also other painter-photographers such as Shigeru Imai or Shimozato Yoshio together with the leading theoretical figures such as Takiguchi Shūzō or Yamanaka Tiroux.

On the other hand, presence of Surrealism can be traced as informing a number of photography practitioners throughout the decade. Starting within the 'new photography' [shinko shashin] movement, especially active at the beginning of the 1930s, its relevance grew stronger within the avant-garde [zenei] image production, especially active in the immediate response to the 1937 exhibition. It continued to drive experimentations of what became known as 'creative' [zōkei] photographic practice in the years between 1939 and 1941, enforced by the ban of the term 'avant-garde' in 1939. These authors had a place among an even larger number of photographers working in the wider photographic scene of the time, without formal links to Surrealism.

Therefore, there is a strong need to find an inclusive approach that would allow unification of all the forms of functioning and appearances of Surrealism within Japanese photography during the 1930s, one possibility offered by allocating it a collective force of a minor photography.

As we have seen so far, the photographic scene in Japan at the time, and especially its relationship to Surrealism, can very much be considered similar to the work of Kafka that Deleuze and Guattari address in their book *Kafka: Toward a minor literature*, defining the concept of a minor literature. It can also be understood as a 'castle with multiple entrances whose rules of usage and whose locations aren't well known (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 3).'

In the book, the concept is bound to three defining conditions: 'deterritorialization of language, the connection of individual to political immediacy and collective assemblage of enunciations (ibid.: 18).'

Deterritorialization of Surrealist Practice and the Photographic

Drawing on the first defining characteristics of a minor literature, as suggested by Deleuze and Guattari, in which a minor language is 'affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization (ibid.: 3),' we can look into how the dislocation of Surrealist photographic practices in Japan from the formal (international and

national) Surrealist networks (in the structure of its functioning at least) found a means of re-locating into the photographic scene of the time.

On one level, the international framework of Surrealism, as exemplified by Japan, can be viewed as a model of operation of deterritorialization in culture. If we presuppose that it disrupts an immanent contextualization of culture within a fixed location and allows the processes of reterritorialization to re-inscribe it into a new time-space environment (Inda and Rosaldo, 2002: 11-12), we can expand our understanding of Surrealism in Japan on such bases. In his later work, Deleuze was to point out contingency and multiplicity as characteristics of all cultural objects, subject to a complex interaction between international and local forces and factors in his study on the relationship between the minor and cinema (Parr, 2005:167).

On another level, the 'language' of Surrealist photography in Japan demonstrates a definite detachment from what are considered to be its means of operation elsewhere (within the space of Surrealist periodicals and novels) and reattachment to the specific filed of the photographic. The 'decoding' and 'recoding' of the 'Surrealist message,' as characteristics of the notion of deterritorialization (Holland, 1999: 20-21) in the case of Japanese photography at the time happened within the field of the avant-garde photographic practice.

The state 'thought police' [tokkō] kept a close eye on the Surrealists since at least 1936 (Sas, 1999: 21). Withdrawing from the contemporary intellectual and artistic circles densely populated with socially supported propagandist or collaborators of the rising militarist and totalitarian regime is an action one can easily imagine subscribing to.

The deterritorialization of Surrealist photography from within the Surrealist network and its reterritorialization into the photographic scene was previously considered to have originated in the limits imposed by the lack of linguistic, cultural, theoretical and psycho-analytical tools for understanding the complex and multi-layered implications of Surrealism (Japan Professional Photography Society, 1971: 410-411). However, from the perspective offered by the operational characteristics of the network seen as a minor, what should also be taken into consideration are the reasons that formulated a specific visual culture preferred by the strict regulations of the state apparatus and the aesthetic principles dominating the country at the time.

Namely, the reasons for the formulation of this specific structure (in which Surrealist photography existed in Japan) can be viewed as dismissive of its importance as enforced by the lack of adequate means of understanding and interpretation of the 'major' Surrealist 'language'. On the other hand, it can be seen in a more affirmative light, as regulated by the wider socio-political climate, far from being supportive of any vanguard activities. In other words, rather than insisting on the negative qualities of the differences within which this structure operated (not as part of a collective Surrealist action), a more inclusive methodology of accepting it within its specific context should be considered.

In sum, the first principle of a minor literature recognizes the difficult position that the Surrealism-related photographic practice occupied in Japan in the 1930s, as a deterritorialized form of Surrealist activity operating in the field of modernist photography, due mostly to political oppression.

Political Immediacy and Surrealist Aesthetics

Moving onto the second defining characteristic of the minor we should note another prominent feature of the Surrealist photographic practice in Japan. Its dislocation from an immediate Surrealist context resulted in a significant number of images produced possibly not going beyond the repetition of the aesthetic principles of what was considered the standard iconography of visual Surrealism at the time. Although this was by no means a characteristic of *all* Surrealist photography produced, arguably, a large number of practices were concerned only with the formal or technological specifications offered by the Surrealist photographs, as yet another novel approach to image production. This feature is especially present within the wider photographic scene at the time that looked at Surrealist images as a means of inspiration, without any interest of furthering or questioning their Surrealist background. Photographers with close links to Surrealism, and especially Man Ray, clearly informed the works by artists such as Nakayama Iwata or Osamu Shiihara, after being exhibited in Japan and featured in art and photography related periodicals.

A number of clear examples where Surrealist photography was understood as yet another model for *nouvelles* approaches to the media can be easily identified. However, even as such, their (political) relevance, again viewed within what is

considered as the characteristics of a minor photographic force, should not be underestimated.

Drawing on the idea that 'everything is political (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 17),' within a minor literature, as its second characteristic, we could speculate how this deterritorialized collective of disperse voices, by the very action of deliberate production of a certain type of images, would have contributed to a specific form of politically significant activity, operating from a marginalized position imposed on them by the circumstances of the time.

The political is here not actualized in promotion of a specific action (Stivale, 2005: 114) but presupposes a 'people to come,' creating values for a consciousness not yet formed (Parr, 2006: 166). It closely resembles what Agamben terms as the process of rendering power relations inhabiting the language and representation inoperative in order to set the condition of possibility for the coming community (Murray, 2010: 101). A 'people to come' or 'coming community' is the aspiration of such political agency.

At the time, photo-journalistic format was a preferred style of photographic practice advocated for by the militarist regime already campaigning in continental Asia and preparing for the outset of the Pacific War. Under such circumstances, even the iconographic attributes of this type of images represented a form of subversion, proposing alternative means of not only producing but also understanding images.

Therefore, the impact of this minor photographic force was significant not only for the dissemination (and possibly proliferation) of Surrealism's concepts and ideas but for expanding the possibilities of photographic image production outside of the photojournalist function privileged at the time.

This especially refers to Yasui Nakaji's statement in regards to Surrealism from 1941. In a public speech given that year he claimed Surrealism developed because the 'rationalist way of thinking was only limited to surface of things' whereas a part of life equally belongs to unconsciousness. However, he also offered a critique of Surrealism in that it attracted negative associations, since it drew on distorted imagination and conflicted with the present 'time of disturbance' as 'dreams have no moral responsibility (Takeba, 2001: 529-554).'[6] On the occasion, he does recognize the creative process behind the production of photographs (in that, similarly to Japanese *waka* and *haiku* verse, photography remains 'easy and accessible to everyone but difficult to master') but advocates for the function of Surrealism

to be 'fertilizing Japanese culture' in the sense that it would (or has already been) adapted and re-constructed so as to fit Japan's particular needs, as any other 'import' from abroad.

Surrealism-driven experimentation in mapping different territories for photography to inhabit outside of its representational boundaries should, under such circumstances, be seen as not purely of aesthetical concern but rather aimed at undermining the basis for national ideologies, reflected in the promotion of homogenous visual culture.

This problem, viewed in Rancière's terms, would reveal how 'politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it (Rancière, 2006: 13)' as the images in question would head in the opposite direction of what was even considered the moral obligation of photography at the time.

The second principle of a minor literature could therefore be expanded from its interpretation as directly linking the individual with the political (Stivale, 2005: 110-111). In that 'its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately with politics (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 17),' it would possibly allow assigning relevant function to all image production based on or linked to Surrealism, regardless of their formal links to the movement.

Collective Value of Photographic Action

Significantly, all the previously mentioned activities are to be considered in relation to one another, as a 'collective assemblage of enunciations,' adding to a 'collective value (ibid.),' as the third qualifying determinant of a minor literature. Such an approach not only positions the well established professional photographers within the same group but also links their work to a tendency present among a larger number of professional artists and amateurs responding to Surrealism's different concepts from a variety of different positions and perspectives.

Allowing for 'the conception of something other than a literature of masters (ibid.),' it offers an opportunity for an inclusive approach towards these photographers and their work, which viewed from such a perspective rises to a different dimension of relevance for the cultural formations they were contributing or responding to.

If viewed in isolation, the many manifestations of or responses to Surrealism in photography, or the versatile forms of Surrealist photography in Japan would necessarily oversimplify their understanding. However, if taken into consideration collectively, they offer a vibrant and productive dialogue with a number of issues relevant to Surrealism,[7] especially since 'what each author says individually already constitutes a common action, and what he or she says or does is necessarily political, even if others aren't in agreement (ibid.).'

Mesemu Zoku, a Surrealist Album

Possibilities of such an approach can be exemplified with a closer look at the Shimozato Yoshio's volume *Mesemu Zoku, Chōgenjitsushugi Shashinshu*, self-published by the artist in 1941.

The album consists of twenty photographs of Mesemb, a cacti genus from South-West Africa, and besides from Shimozato Yoshio's images includes works by other photographers from the Nagoya Photo Avant-Garde club: Sakata Minoru, Tajima Tsugio and Inagaki Taizo together with the images produced by the cacti collectors Sano Sugeo and Sato Taihei.

Shimozato Yoshio was strongly positioned within the Japanese Surrealist circles at least since October 1936, when he illustrated the cover of a special volume *L'Exchange Surréaliste*, primarily a collection of translations of Surrealist text by André Breton, Paul Éluard, Benjamin Péret and Tristan Tzara but also including Yamanaka Tiroux's text 'Shururearisumu shisōno kokusaika' [Internationalization of Surrealist thought] (Wada, 2001b: 177-207).

In the same year, he developed an interest in the figurative potentials of the plant when he learned of the Surrealist 'natural object' through a special issue of the French magazine *Cahiers d'art* (May, 1936), reporting on the exhibition of Surrealist objects just held in Paris at the Galerie Charles Ratton (Wada, 2001a: 252-299, 303-319). He made a note in his diary that an album of Mesemb images would be an interesting project in this context. He proceeded to make a work inspired by the plant that he exhibited in 1937 and elaborated his interest in the cacti in an article published in the magazine *Mizue* in February 1938.

In the explanatory notes accompanying the album, Yoshio says that the primary aim of the album is of a purely artistic, Surrealist nature, but that it also aspires to be of value to the enthusiasts and scholars interested in the plant. For him, this 'mysterious plant of refined simplicity,' native to the dry climate of South-West Africa invites the mind to 'wander over the features of this strange, far off land at the end of the world.' He notes the resemblance of the types of sub-genus photographed for the album to Freudian symbols and comments on how their enlarged size in some of the images shows exactly how they appeared to himself many times in his dreams (fig.3).[8]
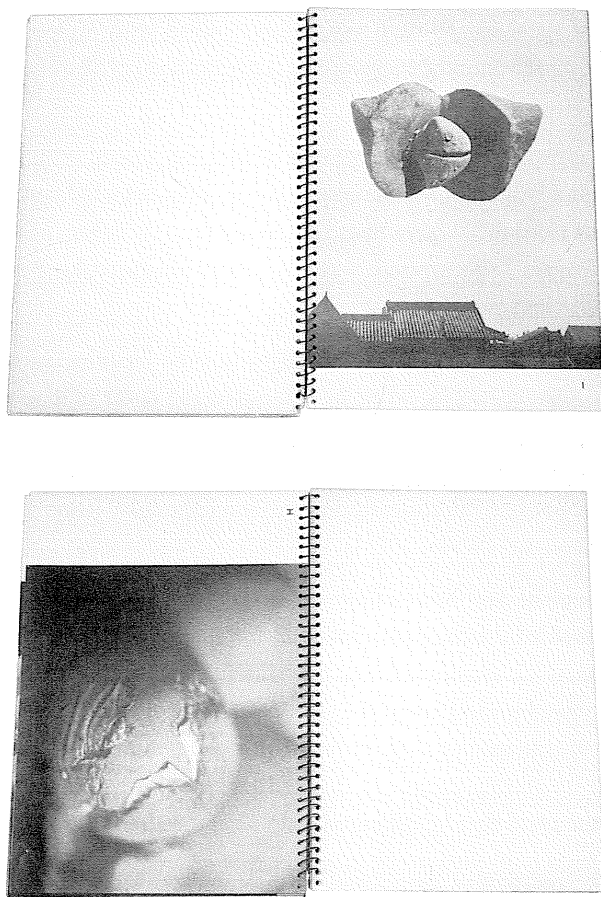
Fig. 3 Shimozato Yoshio, Surrealist photo album of Mesemb genus-Mesemb genus, 20 Surrealist photographs, 1941. © Trustees of the British Museum.
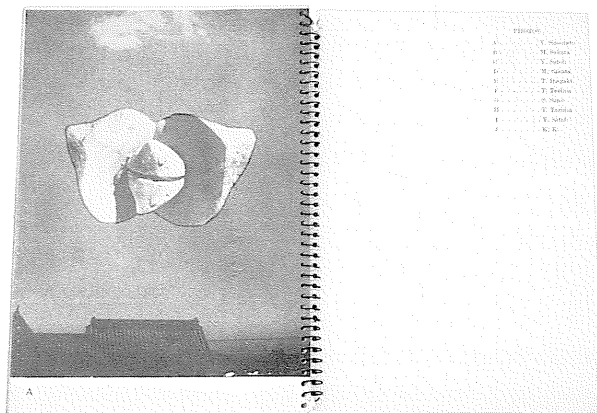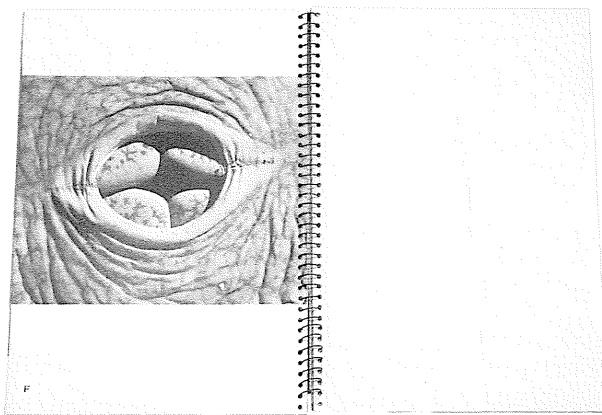
Aside from the clear articulation of the album's aims in relation to Surrealism, the scholarly, uniformed and austere design applied in the album invokes a favored format of the early magazines published by Surrealists in Paris. Opening from both sides with different title in Japanese and French, it simply presents images numerically from one side and alphabetically from another. Furthermore, the choice of subject matter also echoes the type of ethnographic imagery frequently featured in Surrealist magazines, especially *Minotaure* and *Documents* (Walker, 2002: 188-201).

The album, however, becomes of greater interest and importance if viewed not in isolation but in relation to the practice of Tokyo-based Shigeru Imai. His 1938 text published in the October issue of the *Photo Times* magazine entitled 'Shururearisumu fotoni taisuru kaekoto' [The things seen in Surrealist photography], containing a number of his own photo montages, including an image featured in 1938 Paris exhibition, also questions the space of dreams and Surrealist objects in relationship to photography, based on Salvador Dali's 'paranoiac-critical' method. The method, as defined by Dali, together with Surrealist automatism, aims to 'systematize confusion and to contribute to the total discredit of the world of reality (Matheson, 2005: 428).'

Dali's method can be seen as to follow the properties recognized in photography by André Breton in *Surrealism and Painting*, where suggestive potential of the photographic image was defined as being of interest to Surrealism, rather than its value as a faithful trace of the passing moment (Breton, 1972: 32). Photography was to be utilized as another *method* (Bajac, 2009: 18) of Surrealist action, aimed at destabilizing the limiting properties of representation. As such, it might be considered similar to Surrealist painting: 'aiming to assert *by means of the image* other relationships than those generally, or, indeed provisionally established between human beings on the one hand and, on the other, things considered as accepted facts (Breton, 1972: 26).'

Understanding the Shimozato Yoshio's album and Shigeru Imai's text (and practice) as targeting the same goal, they not only confirm the existence of Surrealist photography in Japan, but its practice in the service of Surrealism (Ades, 1985: 187).

Furthermore, the political significance of such practice becomes apparent if this album is contrasted with the Yasui Nakaji's statements. In the final instance, Shimozato Yoshio similarly denounces Surrealism, in a note saying that he no longer pursues the same ideas and is now more interested in a different [zōkei] type of imagery. After what we have seen to have been long and devoted efforts at producing the album, such renouncing is clearly politically motivated. As Takiguchi Shūzō was taken into custody for his relationship to Surrealism and kept for interrogation for around nine months the same year (1941), it becomes apparent that there was a strong need to maintain a firmly oppositional stance towards Surrealism, at least in public addresses, due to possibility of serious consequences.

Conclusion: Contributing to Difference

The three characteristics of a minor literature mirror very closely the specific conditions surrounding Surrealist photography in Japan. As in the example of *Mesemu Zoku* album, they allow an approach to the texts and images produced within related practices as connected to each other and forming what Simon O'Sullivan refers to as 'an alternative or "counter" network outside of the dominant one (O'Sullivan, 2006: 17).' In the case of Japanese Surrealist photography, the alternative network it forms could in such a manner be understood as minor not only in relation to the French or European Surrealist photography but *vis-à-vis* the established modernist photography in the country. It would raise the same problem of 'double alienation (Solt, 1999: 6)' as in the case of avant-garde literary Surrealism in Japan, being equally detached from the mainstream practices of the time.

However, such an approach would re-affirm the implications that the concept of a minor literature, understood as literature of minorities defined by their position in existing power relations, would have for approaching all non-Western, postcolonial, women, gay and lesbian writers as its practitioners (Stivale, 2005: 119).

The approach could include questioning whether Surrealism itself was a 'minor' force in itself. Or, even further, it could entail challenging the functioning of all historical avant-gardes against the concept. As the collectivity implied in the 'collective assemblage' contains the notion of *agencement*, a term referring to an organizational process rather than a static quality (ibid.: 77) it further results in the fact that the particular collectivity does not exist and is yet to come (ibid.: 114).[9]

Could we thereon hypothesize the aim of the historical avant-gardes to have been bounded with a similar time-space context?

In any case, the concept of a minor literature does not exhaust the problems surrounding the production of photographic Surrealist images in Japan. Referring to the study in the field by David Bate, if we presume that what characterizes a Surrealist photograph is 'a type of meaning and not a type of picture (Bate, 2003: 21-22)' a more complex research analyzing further factors surrounding the production and reception of such images in the country would be necessarily required.

On the other hand, if we read the notion against the challenges of writing histories, following on from Mike Kelley's remarks that minor histories are construed as parasitic on the existing, major ones (Joseph, 2008: 48), it would allow for a disruption in the historical account of Japanese art and photography and extend the project of internationalizing the discourse on Surrealist photography.

Viewing Japanese Surrealist photography as a case of minor photography offers a possible *method* for affirming its scope, role and importance, a requirement if this type of imagery is to be considered within the discourse on Surrealist photography *per se*. It offers a possibility of examining if and how this particular minority contributes to the discursive space of Surrealist photography or rather Surrealism itself.

In conclusion, the concept of 'minor photography' offers a possibility that the photographic images produced in relation to Surrealism in Japan during the 1930s can be considered to have contributed significantly to the difference Surrealism was aiming to achieve in regards to how reality is experienced, understood and represented internationally, regardless of, or specifically due to, the particular characteristics determinant of the conditions surrounding their production.

Notes

[1] For a similar situation taking place in Belgium see: Patricia Allmer and Hilde Van Gelder (eds), *Collective Inventions: Surrealism in Belgium* (Leuven University Press, Leuven, 2007): 10. For the qualities of Surrealism's existence in England in this sense see excerpts of the 'International Surrealist Bulletin' (Breton and Rosemont, 1978: 440-446).

[2] As in Yamamoto Kansuke, John Solt, et al., *Yamamoto Kansuke: Conveyor of the Impossible* (Tokyo: East Japan Railway Culture Foundation, 2001) and Yasui Nakaji, *Nakaji Yasui 1903-1942: Yasui Nakaji: modanizumu o kakenuketa tensai shashinka* (Tōkyō: Shinchōsha, 1994).

[3] An overview of the photo-clubs and different artists active at the time is available in Joe Takeba, 'The Age of Modernism, From Visualisation to Socialization,' in Anne Wilkes Tucker, et al., *The History of Japanese Photography* (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 2003): 144-157; The volume also includes illustrations for Hanawa Gingo's *Complex Imagination* (ca. 1938) (11) and Hirai Terushichi's *Fantasies of the Moon* (1938) (143).

[4] More details (in Japanese) and illustrations of the works produced in this club are included in *Nagoya no foto avangyarudo* (Nagoya: Nagoya-shi Bijutsukan, 1989).

[5] A comprehensive overview of the publications is contained in Masahiro Sawa and Wada Hirofumi, *Nihon no shūrurearisumu* (Tōkyō: Sekai Shisōsha, 1995).

[6] Translation: Jelena Stojković.

[7] As best demonstrated within Joe Takeba, *Shūrurearisumu no shashin to hihyō*, Korekushon, Nihon shūrurearisumu, 3 (Tōkyō: Hon-no-Tomosha, 2001).

[8] Translation: Jelena Stojković.

[9] For detailed reading of Surrealism as offering 'affirmative relating of present to future' and 'experience of present as site of possibility,' see David Cunningham, 'A Question of Tomorrow: Blanchot, Surrealism and the Time of the Fragment,' *Papers of Surrealism*, 1 (2003): 1-17.

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¬ Quentin Bajac, Clément Chéroux, Guillaume Le Gall, et.al, 'Changer la vue,' in *La Subversion des images, Surréalisme, Photographie, Film* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2009): 17-20.

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Color Section

Pl. 1 Miroslav Tichý,
MT Inv. no.: 4-6-096. ©
Courtesy of Foundation
Tichý Ocean.

Pl. 2 Miroslav Tichý,
MT Inv. no.: 7-6-49. ©
Courtesy of Foundation
Tichý Ocean.

Pl. 3 Paul McCarthy,
The Veil, 1970. Color
photograph. © Paul
McCarthy. Courtesy of
the artist and Hauser &
Wirth.
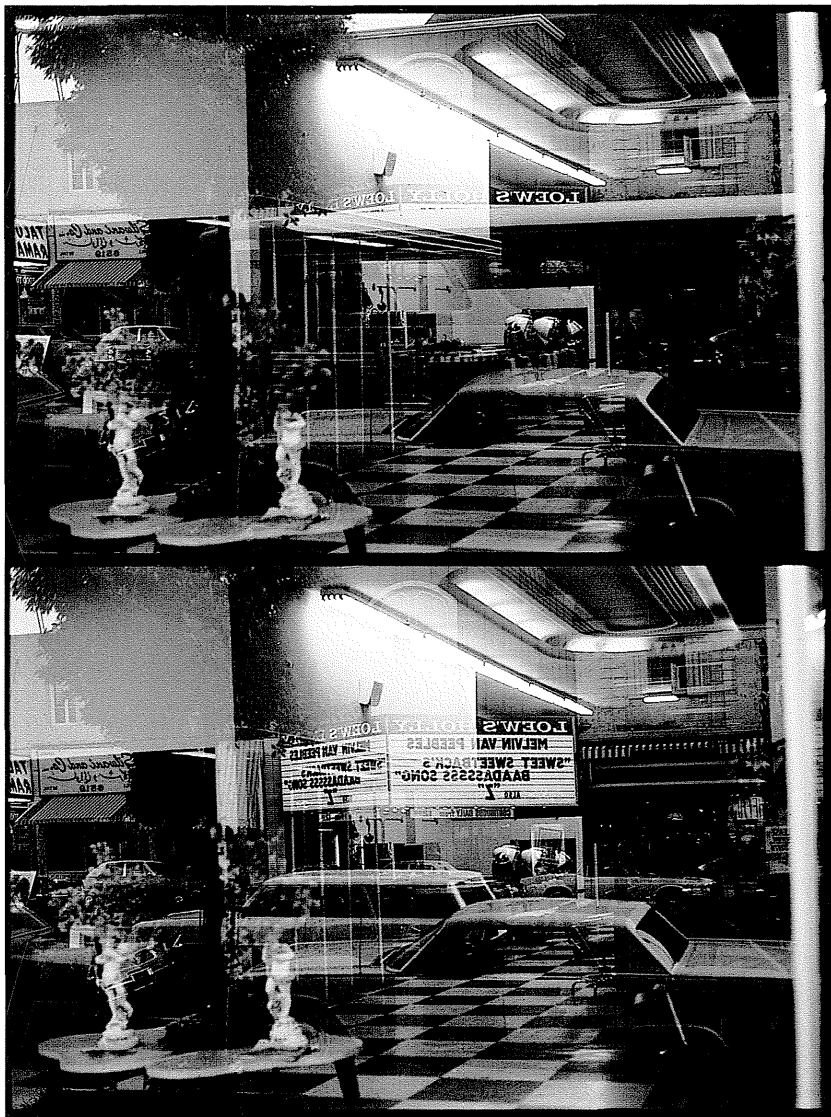
Pl. 4 Paul McCarthy, *Fear of Reflections (Hollywood Boulevard)*, 1971. Color photographs. © Paul McCarthy. Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

Pl. 5 Dan Graham,
Homes for America,
1966-67. Layout boards.
Collection Daled,
Brussels. © Courtesy of
the artist.

Pl. 5 Dan Graham, *Homes for America*, 1966-67. Layout boards. Collection Daled, Brussels. © Courtesy of the artist.

Pl. 6 Jacques Louis Nyst, *The Idea of Color (Leafage)*, 1973, black-and-white photograph, drawing. © Jacques Louis Nyst.
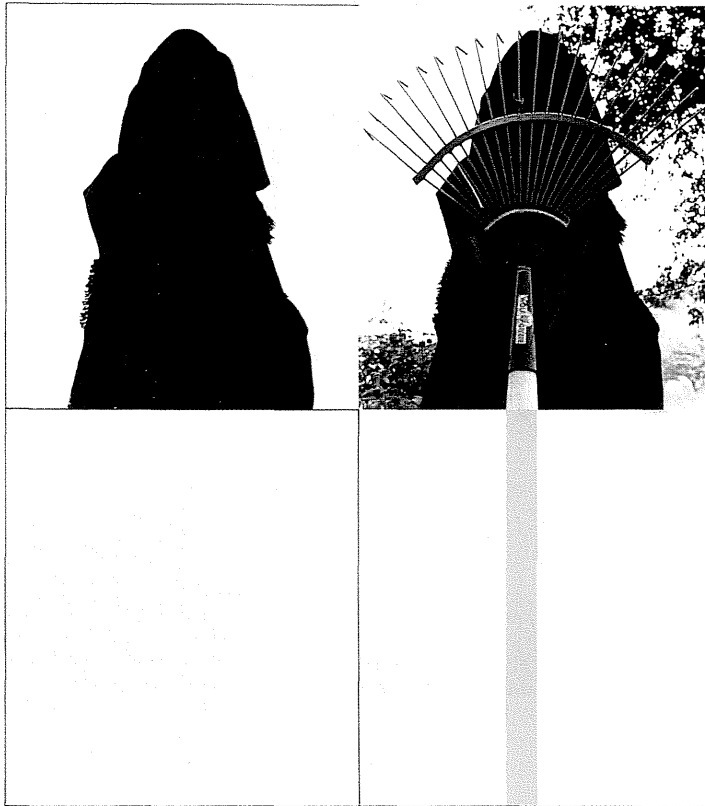
Pl. 7 Jacques Louis
Nyst, *The Fork*, 1974,
black-and-white
photograph, drawing. ©
Jacques Louis Nyst.

Pl. 8 Leo Copers, *The Funeral of René Magritte,* 1971, color slide, ink on paper. Slide projection in the corner of a room, partly on a wall, partly on the floor and partly on a sidewall, so that the projected walls and floor coincide with the real walls and floor. The framed text hangs on the opposite wall or is presented aurally. © Leo Copers.